Camas

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Article 1

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Camas, Winter 1999

Camas

People and Issues of the Northern Rockies

DEEP WINTER 1999 VOLUME 2, NUMBER 4 $4.00

Hunting and Gathering

Grouse Hunting: Behind the Scenes
by Malcolm Brooks

Mushrooms, Poison, and Women
by Steve Rinella

plus: a reflection by Ian Frazier

Camas, a quarterly journal, provides a forum for non-polemical discussion of environmental issues of the Northern Rockies and celebrates the people who live and work in the region.

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Camas Staff

We invite submissions of article ideas, prose and artwork. Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your submission. Thanks.

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Volume 2, Number 4

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Grouse Hunting

Enter the world beyond L.L.Bean images of man and dog traipsing through the sunny fields. In our first feature, Malcolm Brooks confronts what can go wrong in the field. This perceptive piece on a popular American pasttime is crafted with humor and morality.

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The Poison Wait

Steven Rinella takes us into the murky world of mushroom hunting – illuminating the risks and rewards of mycology. In this feature, Steven incorporates personal anecdote, scientific information, and fungal lore for an adventure the reader will find hard to forget.

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Gustave Flaubert's "The Legend of St. Julian the Hospitaller" tells of a young man's ascension to sainthood, albeit in a roundabout way. Julian begins as a priviliged-to-a-fault nobleman with a penchant for hunting. One day, on a hunting trip, this affinity for sport deepens into a lusty fervor, and he begins slaying everything he sees: deer, badgers, peacocks, jays, blackbirds, foxes, porcupines, polecats, and, finally, a majestic stag. As this last animal gasps its dying breath, it roars, "Some day, fercious soul, thou wilt murder thy father and thy mother," a prediction that leads Julian to temporarily, and understandably, give up hunting.

One thing inevitably leads to another (sure I could tell you, but I'd rather you read the short story for yourself), Julian begins to hunt again, and he does in fact commit parricide. Hunting doesn't cause the murders, but it certainly doesn't help that the weapons are conveniently nearby, and his appetite for carnage is appropriately stimulated. With his parents' blood on his hands, the grief-stricken Julian leads a lifetime of persecution and penance, until ultimately, his sins are forgiven and he is rewarded with eternal life in Heaven. The story then ends, except for this final, provocative thought from Flaubert: "And this is the story of Saint Julian the Hospitaller, as it is given on the stained-glass window of a church in my birthplace."

Now, I'm not going to go on a rampage on which is the real killer: knives or people. Nor will I suggest that someone you know is a candidate for sainthood simply by feverishly slaughtering all creatures great and small. Instead, I'll make a decidedly less controversial proclamation: we tell the stories of who we are and what we do. We always have. We tell these stories to reconcile, to understand, and to document. We tell these stories, through oral or written or pictorial traditions, to remember.

Not exactly a shocking idea, I know, but when related to hunting, it is one that is often buried under rhetoric for hunting or arguments against it. Plenty of magazines have run forums for such debates: the I-hunt-therefore-I-am side chest-beaters versus the eating-meat-is-murder chest-beaters. Realistically, that's a little too much chest-beating and far too little discussion of our collective past, present, and future. It's far too little discussion about what we do, who we are, and what we share. Frequently, we *do* hunt, we *are* hunters, and we can share in the experience that such actions afford.

Flaubert found his inspiration in a stained-glass window. We shall find ours between these forty-odd pages and, more importantly, in our own lives. This issue of *Camas* opens up the dialogue not by echoing previous debates, but instead by allowing local authors to write about the lessons, wonders, frustrations, and joys of hunting. Malcolm Brooks dares to examine his mistakes while wielding a gun, while Tara Gunter confronts the mistakes of others. Steve Rinella stalks the wild mushroom, and Lynn Sainsbury finds both beauty and practicality in her hunting foray.

And what we as readers find is something about our humanity, something more lasting than yet another argument—maybe even something about ourselves. That is what storytelling is about, be it on paper, with voices, or in pictures.

P.S. On a final note, I have left not only the beautiful state of Montana, but also the wonderful staff of *Camas* to pursue other interests in Oregon. I send my heartfelt thanks to everyone involved with the journal for a year and a half of invaluable lessons and incomparable joys. *Camas* will now be led by the very capable Sarah Heim-Jonson, who will happily respond to your letters to the editor decrying any of the aforementioned opinions. But seriously, thank you for reading, writing, and caring about the Northern Rockies.

Something About Lightning

by Ian Frazier

Of course we have a computer. I am happy to have it, for status reasons and in order to be like people we know. I never use it myself, though. I couldn't even tell you what kind it is. I know that it turns off with a "Ta-*dah*!" sound, but maybe they all do that. I've never turned it on, myself. My point of connection with it is that I turn it off. Computers hate to be turned off—don't ask me why. Whenever my wife and kids use it, they leave it on, and in passing by I see it on, and I turn it off. I hate to see it glowing away, making that little smug humming noise with no one around. It's not easy to turn off, either. You have to do different things to it, I've learned, depending on what's on the screen. And of course, friends and family think this fixation of mine is pigheaded, old-fashioned, nuts, etc.

You may remember that early last summer Missoula got hit with a series of thunderstorms. Every day, sometimes twice or three times a day, big dark thunderheads built over the Bitterroot Valley, and then rain and sometimes hail, with thunder and lightening, swept through town. One afternoon about six o'clock I was in my basement office working on my manual typewriter when the customary afternoon downpour was split by a terrific sound like a huge whip cracking six inches above my head: our house had been hit by lightning. A bolt shot down the tall spruce trees behind the house, came along the woven-wire fence around the backyard, and entered the house where the fence joins the outside wall. Lights went out, the lawn-sprinkling system went on, sparks shot from the instantly-destroyed TV, my children who were watching it screamed. The stove turned on. Both our answering machines got fried.

The computer, however, survived. It was completely unharmed. Why? Well, it has surge protectors, whatever those are. But more importantly, it was *turned off* at the time. People who know tell me that if the computer had been on when the lightning struck, this very expensive and complicated appliance would have died along with the phone machines and the TV. I'm not sure why the computer happened to be off. I wish I could say that I had turned it off in my usual way half an hour before. The important fact was that it *was* off, and that my inexplicable, Cro-Magnon-man's superstition (if you will) had protected it from the thunder gods. I crowed about this for weeks afterwards. I'm still crowing. Since the lightning, I have looked at the computer—that intimidating piece of modernity thrust into my house by forces beyond my control—with restored confidence, and a trace of condescension. I remind it, "Friend, you need me more than I need you."

Photo by Jeremy Puckett

Ian Frazier, a Missoula resident, is a humorist whose most recent book is titled Coyote v. Acme: A Collection of Humorist Essays .

Elements

by Dave Strohmaier

Clean." That was the first word that came to mind as I slid my hands deep into the burgundy warmth of the mule deer's chest. Clean, not dirty, pure, uncontaminated. I know plenty of folks who might disagree, as if blood and bone and muscle are things to be hidden, mopped up, hosed down and buried, or at least nestled on a bed of styrofoam and wrapped in shiny cellophane.

But last November, on a snow-covered ridge southeast of Lewistown, the buck, inside and out, dead and alive, was clean. He was grown from the rolling landscape of fescue, pine, and aspen—free of steroids, antibiotics, rendered death and disease.

It's amazing to think that his warmth, every fiber of hair, hoof, and steamy breath, didn't spring upon central Montana *ex nihilo*. This deer arose out of a genetic inheritance, some four-and-a-half years back according to a biologist at the Great Falls hunters' checkpoint. Throughout his life, the buck was sustained by sunshine, grass, and water. Very literally, the warm fluid coating my hands was sunshine, grass, and water—clean and sacred, sculpted from elements whose exposure to the universe by my knife and hands was damned serious business.

The next day, I saw magpies picking at the deer's entrails which had melted the snow down to frosted red pine needles. The little claim-jumpers fed upon what the deer had already excavated out of bunchgrass, alfalfa, creek, and big sky. It was one of the first times that I felt kinship with a magpie.

Dave Strohmaier, a long-time deer hunter, is a graduate student in the University of Montana's Environmental Studies Program.

Photo by Jeremy Puckett

Montana Spring

by Ian McCluskey

April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
—T.S. Eliot

I. April

Sun slants sideways through window, runs down opposite wall like water. You snug the covers to your chin, watch your breath scatter, see frost on the glass like mold and streaks that maybe you'll clean, maybe not. Think of your mother and the way her hands smelled of lotion as she smoothed them across your fever. You who are as pale as the water light from a winter spent trudging to buildings over-heated by gurgling radiators. *April, come she will*, your mother read you, but she did not tell you how weakly it comes to Montana.

Mist floats from the Clark Fork, wraps itself around oak trees, rises from sewer lids and drips off pipes. Rain clouds press down mountain slopes onto rooftops. Walk quickly now, past the movie house repainted after the fire, past the cat crouched under the vent of a laundromat. Busses groan from curbs, pickups rattle through intersections. Smell the sky mixing with old paint, wet newspapers, and the smoke from a barbecue.

Bump shoulders with a friend on the Higgins Bridge. He'll tell you he just got off his part-time job, tell you it's time for a beer or, better yet, a stiff drink. Consider the sky. It's afternoon. The sun turns yellow like wood glue. Wind pinches your ears. "Is it beer-thirty?" you ask, not having a watch.

He looks at his wrist. No watch. Peers down into water sliding, ice sheets slipping into currents. Cars pass. He tucks his chin into his collar. He coughs. "Close enough," he says. You join him.

II. Memory

Remember how the moon tangled in the trees, then broke. It soaked the clouds. Remember the night you toted beer to the cemetery to find Hugo's grave, you and your literary cronies, holding a finger in a book to mark your place. Then read aloud to your friends gathered with hands wedged in pockets, noses dripping. Read to loggers and brake men and lap dancers who haunt the Ox. Missoula is a railroad town, still stained by soot.

Remember the night you found a wheelchair. You bumped it along the cracked sidewalks, over frozen puddles, to the Union Hall where The Fencemenders strummed Hank Williams songs. Your partner in crime wheeled you onto the dancefloor and spun you until the faces and the clinks of beer glasses blurred. Lights pulsed. The guitars scraped sharp cords. Dancers collided. Then one girl reeled over to you, looked down at your kneecaps. "What happened to you?"

"I've been saved!" you yelled, leaping out of the chair, grabbing her hand, and jitterbugging. The band cranked the music louder and faster, until everyone stumbled as if falling and falling and falling. Everyone shouted and stomped. And it seemed for one brief moment that your spontaneous wheelchair act had released a tired breath in the bar. People smiled. Crowded the dancefloor. Elbows and armpits and shirts sticky with sweat. And you were all so silly—so silly. Someone wore your hat and another took a spin in the chair.

But then, later, when the band played the last song and clicked guitars into cases, you pushed the chair to someone's car. Your partner in crime hung onto it through the open sunroof as the chilly Montana night blasted your wet faces. You were sore and tired and reeked of spilled beer. And that night, you

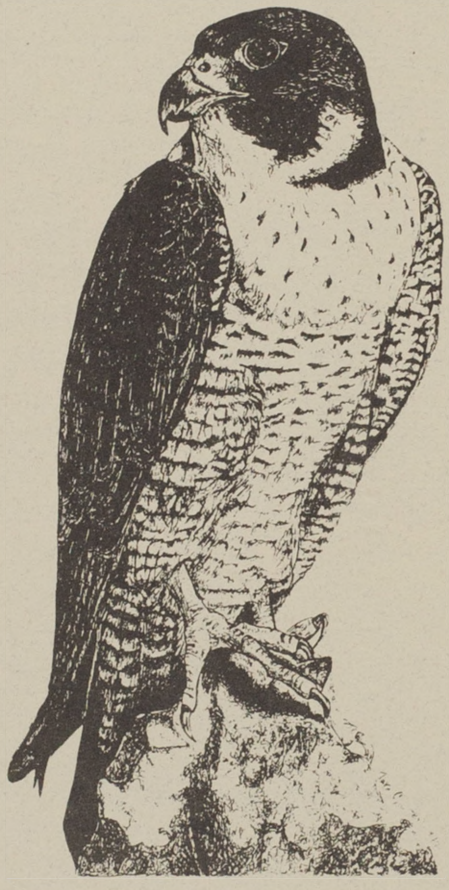
Continued on page 36

REFLECTIONS

Opportunists

by Tara Gunter

Ethan and I walk as silently as the snow allows, boots crunching tracks. Ravens dive and sweep through the trees; even crouching low, we can't surprise them. Their wings are heavy on the air—*floo, floo, floo*—like whirling blades of a ceiling fan. The dark birds fly straight towards us then



Drawing by Tara Gunter

suddenly pull back, hold themselves in mid-air, and flip a change in direction. Cackling, chortling, accusing—a collective pitch escalates and oscillates as each individual spots us.

The ravens are even more indignant as we approach the kill. There, lying in snow patterned by bird feet and swept back in fine strokes by wings, is a decapitated buck. As I look at the stump, I imagine soft eyes and a full rack. The sportsman must not have cared much for deer meat; it is clear to me what had been at stake here. But the scavengers have different ideas about use and little interest in trophies. The birds are hungry and have come to take over where the killer left off. They've utilized the easiest access to the meat: the opened neck.

We walk down the hill and out into an open, fresh clear-cut. The loggers have left behind their machinery, harvested larch, lodgepole, and scarred soil—mud frozen into thick horizontal wedges, tracks of their dozers and skidders. As we round a log deck, a mature bald eagle glides out of a tall spruce and drops behind a forested ridge. A few more steps, and an immature and then another mature eagle fly past us. We have expected, hoped for, these bald eagles. Ethan had seen them earlier this morning—they and the ravens burst out in a frenzy of wings and cries when he first stumbled upon them feeding on the carcass. Still, these eagles are startling in their silent appearance. The ravens, conversely, are causing a commotion about fifteen yards ahead of us. At the end of the rough road, just below a small rise, we find another dead buck. This one was gut shot, but his head is still intact. Two tiny spikes mark his youth and inadequacy to hang from a wall.

We track the opportunists between the two kills the rest of that morning and the next day, trying in vain to get a close look at the bald eagles—the ravens always give us away. I try not to focus on the ethics displayed by the gunman and the logging company, who cut at the worst time of the year for the soil—after a heavy rainfall and before the first freezing. The eagles and ravens somehow make matters more confusing. It is an ideal situation for them, as it had been for the shooter and loggers. For me, there is no room for idealism, only a shifting shape of emotions, like wind sweeping a cornice.

Tara Gunter is a graduate student in the Environmental Studies Department at the University of Montana.

ESSAY

Antlered Skulls

by Lynn Sainsbury

I am ringed by antlered skulls. They watch my back as I sit here writing at my coffee table. My house has an inordinate number of skulls—deer, raccoon, dolphin, and bobcat among others. As a biologist I collect them along with other zoological detritus I find in the woods. But the deer skulls hold more meaning than memory. They hold me accountable. Four mule deer and one whitetail whisper their stories to me through naked white bone. I hear again and again how they died, how I killed them. The blank eye sockets pin me to the specific. They are the vortex stitching together a wrinkle in time. While stretched out across a crusty piece of snow one fall day, I applied a second's worth of pressure to a rifle trigger, two billion seconds later I am there again.

My first lesson in accountability occurred when I was sixteen—the day of the pig slaughter. My boyfriend—the owner of the pigs—emerged from his house covered in blood as I pulled into his driveway one fall day. He hefted a .44-magnum pistol, shrugged, and grumbled, "The last two are so stirred up a .38 won't kill 'em. You come ta help?" It was hindrance, not assistance I lent. The blank staring eyes shining from heads shaved of flesh, and the way the blood dried black on my shoes horrified me. But most disturbing of all was the easy banter of humans engaged in the murderous production line. I could not eat the ham, bacon or chops from those pigs. Meat became death—a truth I was unwilling to be mixed up with.

My fit of vegetarianism lasted less than a year however. The change was, in part, a hardening of the heart—a getting used to death. Hunting season following closely on the heels of the pig slaughter. Elk, deer and antelope carcasses again filled the void of the meat locker. In the space of a day, a great gathering of jovial humans reduced them to little white packages that were stacked in the chest freezer like cordwood against the coming winter. Leavings of bone, tendon, and hide were dumped for the coyotes below the sheltering branches of a large ponderosa pine tree in the upper end of the meadow. Later, a February blizzard coincided with calving season, and too late we laid freezing newborns next to the woodstove, only to watch them die. A year's worth of nightly transformations—butcher paper-wrapped steak into dinner—was a clue leading me to imagine

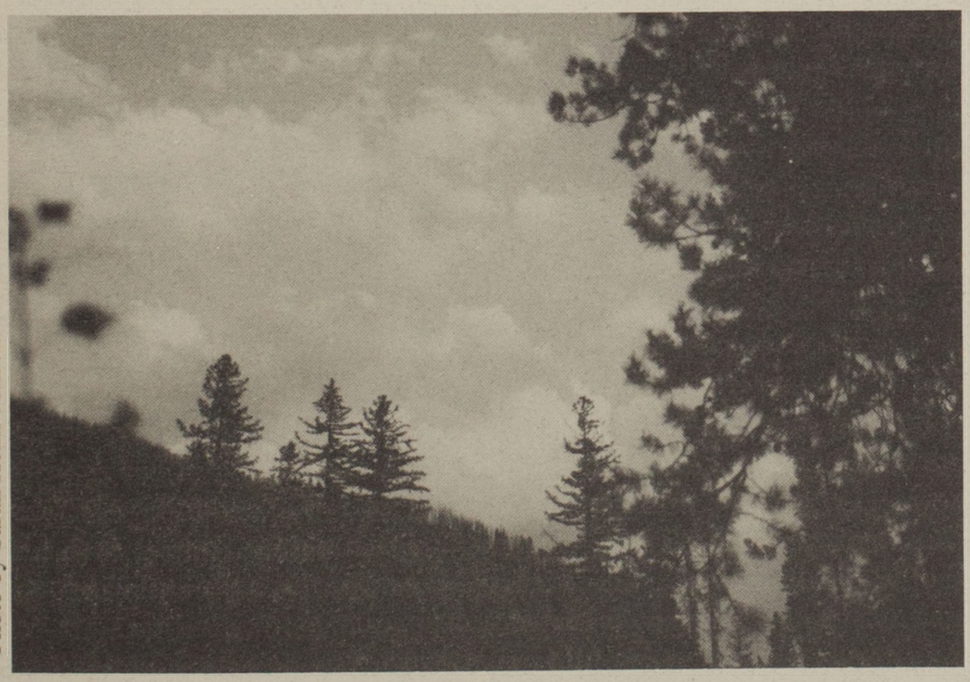


Photo by Sarah Heim-Jonson

Because I was a girl, I wasn't expected to hunt. The pursuit and slaying of animals existed in the realm of the masculine. Bringing home the venison was a man's purview.

myself as part of this world, not above it. To be a part of something means living with the consequences. Three years after I shrank from the deaths of pigs, I borrowed one of my father's rifles and went deer hunting for the first time.

It was, perhaps, an inevitable outcome. I was not raised by a band of vegetarians. Supper fare had been slight variations on a singular theme: cooked-to-pulp vegetables escorting a main dish straight from a *Betty Crocker Cookbook*, publication date 1958. A main dish just wasn't one unless it contained animal flesh of one sort or another, and more often than not that flesh was wild. My father was a hunter. Hundreds of pounds of meat from mountain goat, Dall sheep, caribou, or moose accompanied him south from Alaska where he spent the summer field seasons. The heads and hides of these magnificent animals adorned the walls of the house I grew up in, though hunting existed for me in the abstract. Though I had grown up viewing and eating the spoils of my father's hunting, he did not weave his stories of the chase and kill in my presence. Because I was a girl, I was not expected to hunt. The pursuit and slaying of animals existed in the realm of the masculine. Bringing home the venison was a man's purview.

I have railed against the limitations imposed upon me by virtue of having been born a girl for as long as I can remember. Growing up a tomboy, I often crossed the line—partaking in "male activities"—but I stumbled into hunting because I was hungry. I attended college on a parental scholarship—my books, fees and tuition were paid for. But, I was expected to earn living expenses beyond campus. Like a squirrel, I made my livelihood during summers and meted it out slowly for the duration of the year. Three months worth of wages—even good ones—were stretched like a piano wire. Things were tight. I got damn sick of macaroni-and-cheese.

In 1983, a deer license in Colorado was seventeen dollars. Good deer country—mountain mahogany flushed foothills—began at the Ft. Collins city limits and ran up into national forest and state land ten miles to the west. I could leave the house at five a.m. and be perched on a good lookout by five-thirty. That's about fifty cents for gasoline per outing. One box—twenty rounds—of ammunition ran twelve bucks. An average mule deer buck weighs in between one-fifty and two hundred pounds. Not counting bone, hide and innards, one deer yields something like eighty to a hundred-twenty pounds of meat. Give yourself an entire day to turn a carcass into steaks, burger and roasts, then wrap it up in seven dollars worth of butcher paper. Price per pound? About thirty-one to forty-seven cents—less than a box of Kraft dinner.

I continue to hunt, in great part, because, like an addict, I am hooked on good, cheap food free of antibiotics, hormones, and fat. I've heard and understand the arguments for vegetarianism, and agree with them in many respects, especially when speaking about the corporate meat market. Thing is though, every move we make has effects. Commercially produced crops are themselves chock-full of jazzy compounds I'd just as soon avoid: pesticides, manipulated genes and radiation. Organic is not just pricey—mostly beyond the means of my continuing squirrel-like existence—it too requires plowed-under habitat and water shares. I prefer directness. The exact effect a bullet has on the warm life of a deer is a third-degree burn in my psyche. The skulls are a constant reminder.

Lynn Sainsbury, a recent graduate of the University of Montana Environmental Studies program, lives in Potomac, Montana.

Grouse Hunting

by Malcolm Brooks

Our first feature is written from the perspective of an avid sportsman.

In addition to bird hunting, Mr. Brooks excels at freelance writing, including publishing pieces in *Sportsman Afield.*

This past autumn I made a bad shot on a grouse, perhaps my worst in fifteen years of enthusiastic bird hunting.

I made this blunder along O'Brien Creek, a wraith of burbling water about the width of the average indoor hallway, west of the Bitterroot River outside Missoula. The outing would have been notable regardless of the bad shot, for two reasons: 1) my animal-loving, non-hunting wife Henrietta was along with me for the first time that season, and 2) I was disheartened upon arrival to discover that a full mile of creek frontage had been posted and staked out for development in the ten days since I'd last hunted here. This particular domino in the great tumbling game of semi-rural housing expansion happens to be superb ruffed grouse habitat—brushy creek bottom, tag alders and hawthorns, aspens in the scree up above—which is hardly a concern to either the prevailing big-game culture or a Fish and Wildlife department that knows exactly where its bread is buttered. In this neck of the woods, the dedicated upland bird hunter is pretty much on his own.

I left my gun unloaded while we walked the access road out beyond the final neon boundary marker, then loaded up and ambled down along the creek after Buck, our turbo-charged German shorthair. He disappeared immediately into a tangle of undergrowth, but we pushed along behind the chime of his tracking bell as best we could, whistling him back when he gained too much distance. Though overcast, the day was also fairly warm, and before long we paused so Henrietta could tie her wool overshirt around her waist. I was glad she'd come along. Though she'd helped me dress birds in the back yard and enjoyed the meals we made of them afterward, by chance she'd never happened to

Photo by Gretchen Aston

I wanted to fix this, to show her the whole experience: the edgy uncertainty of every step before locating the quarry ... the timpani roar of a flushing grouse and the bark of a shotgun, the lethal grace of a perfect wingshot, the way a bird inflates and then crumples when hit ...

accompany me on a day when I actually killed anything. I wanted to fix this, to show her the whole experience: the edgy uncertainty of every step before locating the quarry, the way the dog routs through the brush and finally locks on point, the timpani roar of a flushing grouse and the bark of a shotgun, the lethal grace of a perfect wingshot, the way a bird inflates and then crumples when hit, the way the game feels in your hand and in your heart before it winds up in your mouth.

David Mamet recently published a wonderful piece describing a cathartic escape from Manhattan to the Vermont deer woods that ends with nothing in the bag. Still, he graciously dubs the outing, "a successful hunt," a sentiment I understand perfectly even though hunting for me has never been a respite from the metropolitan bustle—at times the metropolitan bustle has been my respite. But nobody who loves to hunt necessarily needs to bring something home from the field to have a great day. Recently while duck hunting I killed nothing but was fortunate enough to see a pair of blue herons in a territorial squabble over a sandbar, a bizarre episode of gangly legs and Mesozoic shrieks that made my whole week.

By the same token, hunting for me cannot be a purely academic exercise, a simple excuse to get out of the house or away from the headaches of modern life. Mamet closes his piece by noting, "As a hunter, of course, I am a fraud. But it was a hell of a good vacation," and here is where a difference in at least priority and perhaps sensibility emerges. For me, field sports aren't reducible to the territory of the simple distraction. I need to hunt actually rather than conceptually; at some point hunting has to entail killing and cleaning, cooking and consuming, as much as it involves tromping around the woods with a gun. I love to hunt for myriad reasons, but certainly not as a temporal holiday.

At any rate, I wanted Henrietta to know why I live for September.

We picked our way across the creek on stepping stones and followed the dog through a dark stand of mixed conifers and juvenile cedars, emerging into another patchwork of open ground and hawthorn shrubs. I can't recall if we saw Buck on point before we heard the firecracker takeoff of a flushing grouse, but it wouldn't have mattered—even with all the warning in the world, I'm never quite prepared when one does decide to get up and go. The bird succinctly vanished, a momentary gray streak above the hawthorns, reduced to memory practically before it had even registered in any cognitive sense. I was all set to be disappointed by the missed opportunity, except Buck hadn't moved and two more grouse came up right behind the first. We were into an entire covey.

Killing grouse on the wing—while they're airborne, doing what they do best—is all about snap shooting. It's a credit to their species that they don't give the gunner time to think; up and away like buzz-bombs, they wind at full speed through the densest brush

and the thickest timber with a bull bat's radar precision. Grouse are hard to wingshoot, which is why the standard means of taking them here in the rifle-ready West is off a tree limb, with a .22. We then denigrate these birds for stupidity, as though several decades of killing them in so utterly anticlimactic a manner should override eons of a perfectly feasible reliance on the natural camouflage of their plumage and tree-top refuge for ninety percent of their security.

The other ten per cent is flight, and it's their ace-in-the-hole. Learning to shoot them in the air requires learning to simply react—lock onto the bird and pull the trigger. Most of the time the grouse wings on unscathed, though like anything else improvement is directly related to the amount of time invested. So I bird hunt a *lot*, not only because I want to learn to do it well, but because I want to learn to do it *right*.

Grouse were still flying up out of the hawthorns, scattering in such frenetic disorder that it became impossible to know how many were in the air and how many remained on the ground.

A bird flew directly toward me, no doubt more intent on escaping the dog than on paying attention to where it was flying. This had never happened to me—usually a flushed grouse diminishes rapidly in the distance, but this bird loomed larger by the millisecond, right at eye level across the gun barrel, closer and closer until I thoughtlessly touched the trigger.

Dislodged feathers blew out behind the bird like wreckage debris; its body sailed past my head like a definition of inertia, finally thumping down hard on the ground at my back. I thought, *God that was close. It's down behind me. There's another flush* in something like that order, then shot at and missed a second grouse as it arced across the hawthorns and melted into the timber up the slope.

Henrietta pointed at the ground practically at her feet when I turned around. "It's right there," she said, "I saw it fall."

When I stooped to pick it up, the bird was gone.

A bird hunter can bungle a kill in one of two ways: the quarry is either shot too effectively, or not effectively enough. The former situation generally results from shooting at too close a range; the pellet cluster has not had time to disperse concentrically, resulting in tissue damage so extensive as to render the meat unusable. You're obligated to save what you can, which often is nothing at all.

The latter occurs when the bird is too far away, hit by a pellet or two that perhaps knocks a wing out of commission but otherwise leaves the poor creature alive, on the run, and fully determined to avoid capture. You're then obligated to find the bird and finish what you've started.

Learning to gauge distance is a part of responsible shooting. Paradoxically, it's a lesson that can never *totally* be learned, particularly with snap shooting because of the lack of deliberation. A flushing bird produces the same synaptic response in a gunner that the flight of prey produces in a feline, but for humans the margin of error can in-

... I thoughtlessly touched the trigger. Dislodged feathers blew out behind the bird like wreckage debris; its body sailed past my head like a definition of inertia, finally thumping hard on the ground at my back .... When I stooped to pick it up, the bird was gone.

Henrietta found a streak of sticky blood on the grass where the bird had crashed down, and I realized then that I'd made both textbook blunders at the same time: shot too close, but somehow left the bird alive and running.

crease as calculation time decreases. You begin to acquire a sort of instantaneous prescience after a time that helps to reflexively pass on a potentially bad shot—perhaps this is just attenuated self-control—but every season nevertheless produces its harrowing share of wounded, splattered, or otherwise badly killed birds.

There is really no way to favor one sort of ignominious death over another. A close shot may provide a quick and painless demise, but for naught if the bird is too damaged to eat, while a wounding shot can still result in a great fricasee but at the awful expense of tormenting the game beforehand. It's a lose-lose situation.

By all rights this grouse should have gone down like a barn burning, leaving about as much behind to salvage. I knew immediately that I had no business making so close a shot, and felt like a humbled tyro because of it. Henrietta found a streak of sticky blood on the grass where the bird had crashed down, and I realized then that I'd made both textbook blunders at the same time: shot too close, but somehow left the bird alive and running. This was not what I had in mind by asking Henrietta to come hunting with me.

Buck was coursing the timber for more birds. I whistled him back, put him on the blood streak, and followed him around saying, "Dead bird," which struck me as grossly inaccurate but is nonetheless a command he understands. I looked at Henrietta and said more honestly, "I'm sorry."

Photo by Shelly Truman

"Does this always happen?"

I shook my head. "It's sort of the worst-case scenario."

"Can we find it?"

"I don't know," I said truthfully, "but we have to try."

I have said that my wife loves animals, and this is as true a statement as I can make about her—she loves them, I sometimes think, more than she loves humanity. The fact that she married me may seem contradictory to those who picture hunters solely along the lines of two-guys-in-a-pick-up-truck-with-loaded-guns-and-a-six-pack, a ste-

reotype even I find not entirely unjustified. Some people probably do want to kill things to atone for their sexual neuroses; others are indeed plainly sadistic, the kind who as kids tied firecrackers to the cat or tortured gerbils for a head rush; others compensate for their own squeamishness with incredibly boorish behavior—say the dead deer strapped to the hood with a cigarette between its lips. These people aren't hunters in the legitimate sense of the word. Nobody, in fact, dislikes them as much as a hunter.

I'm not talking about garden-variety sins of youth here—everybody has a few of those—I'm talking about a failure to develop beyond them, a failure to ever grasp the essential truth that occupying the upper rung of the food chain carries a tremendous responsibility. Henrietta may never revel in the hunt the way I do, but neither is she benighted enough to believe that anything can exist independently of other sensory life—we *all* survive at the expense of something else. Even the vegan's clear conscience comes at the price of the rodents destroyed in defense of the crop. Each year in our own garden, competing mouths die.

I know that my wife would love nothing more than to walk up to an unafraid wild deer and simply place her hands upon it, but she knows that this will never happen. Empathy toward what you eat is the ultimate agony of being human—the only option is to revere your prey and wish it the best of luck, otherwise a painless death, and love it for the sustenance it provides. Henrietta kicked through the leaves and crawled around in the brush as determinedly as any hunter I know, looking for a bird that I wounded.

Buck pointed on an ancient tangle of dead limbs and leaves a few minutes later, thirty yards from the blood streak. I tore at the branches like a terrier, heard the liquid murmur of a petrified grouse an instant before the bird ducked out the back of the tangle and darted past me into the trees. I was nowhere near quick enough to snatch it up, but I did get a look at the problem—the shot string had sheared the right wing completely free of the body, cut right through muscle and bone, leaving the wing to drag the ground by a single pathetic shred of skin. But its legs still worked—by the time I pushed through the trees myself, the grouse had disappeared once again.

Buck continued to hold his point at the woodpile, unaware that the bird was no longer there. I physically peeled him away and pulled him through the trees behind me, saying "Dead bird" to get him working again. After another few moments of an even purer anxiety—I had horrible visions of the bird just running on into eternity—Buck pointed on another brush pile. This time I caught the faintly hypnotic motion of russet plumage weaving through the shadows, glimpsed the raindrop glint of a tiny brown eye, and lunged.

I wrung the bird's neck as though my own life depended upon it. I sat and showed the game to my enormously freaked-out,

Some people probably do want to kill things to atone for their sexual neuroses; others are indeed plainly sadistic, the kind who as kids tied firecrackers to the cat .... These people aren't hunters in the legitimate sense of the word. Nobody, in fact, dislikes them as much as a hunter.

Their flesh is like ambrosia, arguably the best table meat in the world, leaner and firmer than chicken and flavored by the sum total of their own wild diet, totally unobtainable through any means other than hunting.

tear-fighting wife and thought, *This did not exactly go according to plan.*

We roasted the bird the next evening, strips of bacon draped across its breast to add fat and seasoning. The grouse was a big adult male that fed three of us, including a friend who fortuitously dropped by at dinner time. Not one pellet had pierced the body; as table fare, its equal couldn't have been bought.

Bird hunting is not, of course, a purely subsistence proposal. It's not even *primarily* about subsistence—a big deer in the larder translates to six months of meals, an elk into far more, while even the largest American game bird, wild turkey, won't stretch much beyond Thanksgiving dinner. It would be nigh on to impossible to kill enough fowl in a single season to carry a person, let alone two people or a family, through an entire year.

Our selectively reductivist age has a tendency to view hunting in an either/or framework: hunting is either borne of necessity, or it's dead wrong. This strikes me as simplistic, although I do hunt big game most specifically for physical sustenance. I'm aware that I could eat beef or chicken, and I sometimes do, but I like venison better, and I *feel* better about the hormone- and synthetic-free diet of wild game than I ever could about domestic meat. Plus the blood is on my hands, quite literally—I don't ever want to forget that meat doesn't travel from a vacuum directly to the deli counter. I also *enjoy* deer hunting—not with the passion or degree of obsession I bring to bird hunting, but it's right up there. Thankfully, sustenance and satisfaction don't mutually exclude.

In the total equation, I suppose bird hunting is about subsistence simply because it contributes to my total food supply, but I'd be lying if I said I hunt birds for pure practicality. I hunt birds because I love to hunt birds. If I had to make a choice between deer hunting with its larger returns, or bird hunting with its greater appeal, I'd hang up my deer rifle and never look back.

Writer, falconer, and all-around Renaissance man Steven Bodio suggests that formal bird hunting over pointing dogs is, along with fly-fishing, the elevation of basic food-gathering into an elaborate ritual of chase, challenge, and immersion into the natural world, a sort of nexus of aesthetics and survival. In the case of modern fly-fishing, the ritual can become purely academic when the fish is released back to the water. There are even vegetarian fly-fishers, and fly-fishers who loudly abjure the (it seems to me) parallel activity of hunting, because in hunting the ritual remains written in blood. To wit: you can't place a dead bird back into the air.

If I had to distill my enthusiasms ever further, I'd forsake all other blood sport in favor of grouse hunting. Now we're really on thin pragmatic ice; this season I killed eight ruffed grouse, two less than last season, so I'm clearly not motivated by elemental survival. But grouse fascinate for a number of reasons, both as a species and as a quarry. It's true that they're

probably the toughest bird to consistently hit on the wing, and the least likely to behave in a predictable manner when pointed. They can be difficult simply to locate, let alone kill—the daily bag limit in Montana is three, and I've never managed to fill it.

Ruffed grouse are North America's most widely distributed native upland game bird, with a natural range extending from Nova Scotia down through New England and the Appalachians to Georgia, across Canada and the Great Lakes region to the Rockies and the Pacific Northwest, up to Alaska and down into Northern California. They have never been successfully domesticated, either dying in captivity without reproducing or escaping back to the wild in short order. I love this about them.

Grouse are true opportunists when it comes to grub. I've found their crops gorged with everything from aspen buds to snow berries to rose hips to black ants to wild currants to buffalo berries. They also eat grasshoppers, larch needles, hawthorn berries, choke cherries, elder berries, grass seed—whatever it takes.

In the springtime the big males fan their tails on fallen logs and drum to attract mates, the drumming sounding exactly like a recalcitrant Briggs and Stratton lawnmower engine firing up after a long winter in the tool shed. Nobody's quite sure how a grouse makes this sound, or with what part of its body, another fact I love.

Their flesh is like ambrosia, arguably the finest table meat in the world, leaner and firmer than chicken and flavored by the sum total of their own wild diet, totally unobtainable through any means other than hunting.

Like humans, grouse are by turns heart-wrenchingly frail and mind-bogglingly resilient. Sometimes a single pellet brings them down like the proverbial doornail, at other times they hit the ground

Continued on page 33

Photo by Shelly Truman

Photo by Jeremy Puckett

Kate Davis, director of Raptors of the Rockies, started the educational program in 1988, bringing wild birds into the classrooms around Montana out of the back of an old Subaru. Now, eleven years later, Raptors of the Rockies is an incorporated non-profit running more than 80 programs a year. Over 42,000 people have participated in programs with Kate and her wild birds. In this profile, author *Tiffany Trent* provides us a closer look at Kate, her raptors, and what happens behind the scenes at Raptors of the Rockies.

I stepped out of my truck into golden Montana afternoon. Three dogs greeted me, tails wagging uncertainly. Music filtered from within the old ranch house nearest me, and I walked hesitantly towards the open door. Kate Davis emerged, looking much as she had when I'd last seen her, a young, weathered face and twinkling blue eyes smiled out above a nondescript T-shirt and jeans. We immediately set off on the grand tour of the place that the educational program "Raptors of the Rockies" calls home. I had arrived just in time for feeding, so Kate fetched a bucket of chicken and Columbian ground squirrel carcasses while she talked. Alice, the Cooper's hawk, became my first acquaintance. Her home is a converted chicken coop, and the irony amused me, as Cooper's hawks are also referred to under the ignominious name of "chicken hawk". Her coop-mate is a Western screech owl named Crackity Jones, who seemed quite awake as Kate left her meal for her, despite the hour of the day.

Outside the coop, I noticed a pan of what looked like rabbit chow and greens next to a hole under the old chicken house. Kate noticed my glance. "Oh, that's Bunny's food pan. She might come out later."

"Bunny?" I asked, eyeing Max the Golden Eagle as he hopped from his perch on the opposite side of the enclosure. Assuming the rabbit might provide some kind of environmental enrichment for the eagle, I was surprised when Kate said, "Yeah, Bunny and Max are friends. Ever since she's been here, he won't even touch rabbit if I put it out." Kate then went on to tell me the story of Bunny's arrival, this time while she gutted a Colombian ground squirrel for Max's dinner. "He likes it better this way," she said as an aside, then continued telling me how a homeschool group had offered her a rabbit as a means of payment for allowing them to come visit her facility. "After they left, I saw this box on my picnic table. When I got up to it, it was rattling around like there was something alive in it, and then I opened it and there was Bunny." Bunny eventually made herself a comfortable house beneath the old chicken coop in Max's enclosure and they've been roommates since then. "I'm hoping to write a children's story about Bunny, Max and Tipper [one of Kate's three dogs]", Kate said as we walked to the perch where she usually deposits Max's food. Max took great feathered leaps to the other side of the cage as we approached. His great wings looked perfect to me, so I asked, "Why doesn't he fly?"

"We're not entirely sure," Kate replied, "but I imagine he's brain damaged from being poisoned. He's been here since he was a fledgling and he's never really tried to fly." There was a tenderness in her voice that seemed to contrast with her words. We waited to see if he would take it while we watched, but Max eyed us almost speculatively and waited until we moved on to the next enclosure. We visited each subsequent enclosure, Kate speaking gently but firmly to each occupant, telling me the details of their lives. In each bird's story there was a tragedy—shooting, poisoning, hay-swathing during the nest season—but there was also an inherent personality. "All birds have their own personalities, individually and species-wise ... I can predict what they're going to do; I know them because of the thousands of hours I've spent with them."

This kind of attention and care is evident also in the way in which they are housed. Not only are they fed a varied diet to maintain their interest in eating, each bird is fed according to its preferences. Some rip their food with their beaks; others enjoy them more if Kate cuts them up and places the pieces around the enclosures. Each pen is spacious and very tidy, often with an outdoor "porch" for the birds to get some sunshine. Perches covered with astroturf protect the birds' feet and are hung at various heights and places for environmental enrichment. Between changing water, daily feeding, and other maintenance, it usually takes Kate two hours

a day to perform the tasks essential to the birds' health.

Kate came to her love and care for raptors naturally. Her history with animals goes back to childhood, when she was out catching snakes, turtles, and frogs with the best of the tomboys. When she was 13, she became part of the Junior Zoologist club at the Cincinnati Zoo. This program was extremely intensive and important for her development as a naturalist. She learned how to rehabilitate wild animals, becoming the Ohio state expert on raccoon rehabilitation. She moved on from raccoons to other mammals such as foxes and skunks. While these animals supplied her with a wealth of information about their care and rehabilitation, they also became the sources for numerous misadventures. For instance, Kate mused on skunk rehab that "...one skunk was enough. The only skunk I ever had sprayed right in the air conditioning duct in the house. My mother said that was **it** then." She also did taxidermy for the zoo, which strengthened her understanding both of taxonomy and anatomy of the animals with which she worked. But it was birds, raptors in particular, that became her passion.

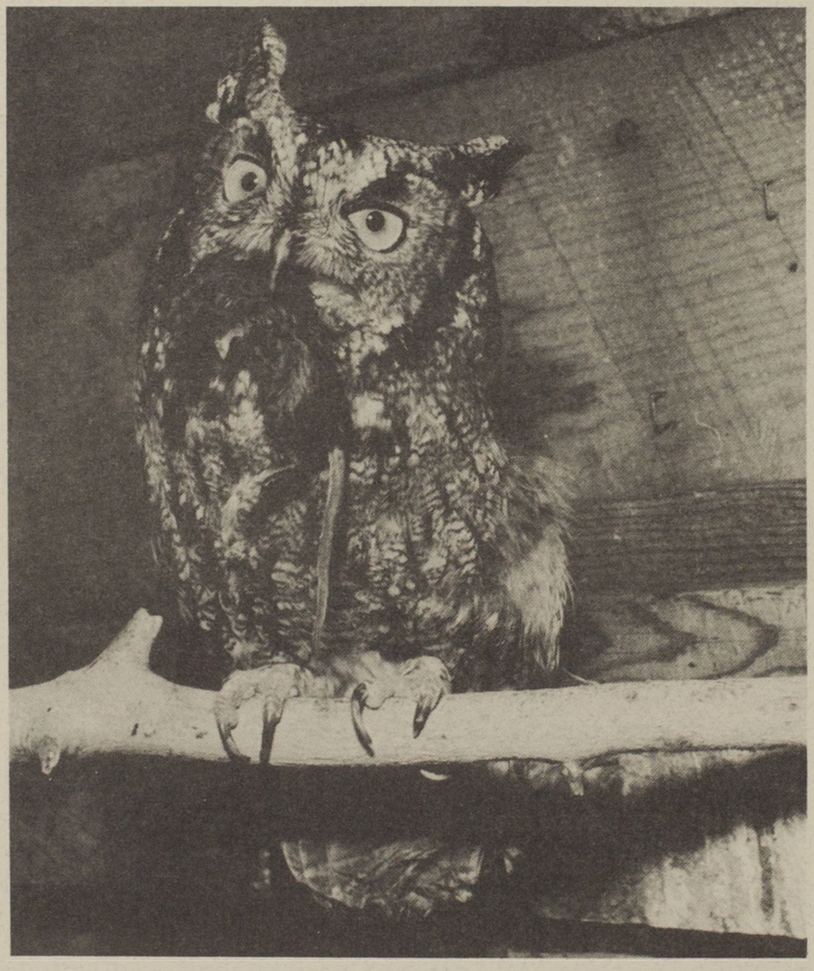


Photo by Jeremy Puckett

"The idea of predatory birds," she said as we sat at her picnic table, her voice filling with reverence, "They have such a difficult lifestyle—hunting things that don't want to be eaten. They're beautiful, intelligent, gorgeous things..." The childlike eagerness with which Kate discusses raptor lifestyles draws in anyone who cares about animals. "When I see a hawk go after something, and he gets it, I just say, 'Yeah! Good for him!'" Her eyes are like blue fire as she says this, and her whole body language expresses the primal joy of the hawk's kill. "Raptors have a 70% mortality rate." The choices they have to make and the skills they have to develop to survive are as crucial as Kate's own.

Kate has chosen to make a life for herself based on what she loves most. Hearing John Craighead speak one time of the Rockies, Kate knew that this was where she wanted to be. She attended the University of Montana and got her degree in Zoology, and shortly after graduating reapplied for her federal permits as rehabilitator and exhibitor. In 1988 she started the "Raptors of the Rockies" program, which has always been a totally self-funded operation. As of this year, Kate's program total is at 480 presentations, with over 42,000 people of all ages served. Kate's goal with the program is "to instill awareness" in the older people she reaches, and also "to instill respect for wildlife" in her younger audiences. "There's nothing like actually learning something by experiencing it, like hooting up owls, or finding owl pellets, seeing that sharp-shinned hawk dart past the bird-feeder, watching bald eagles catch fish in real

life...Kids are knowledgeable, but they're pulling most of it from the Discovery Channel or Animal Planet." Kate hopes in some small way her programs can give kids a taste of what they could experience in the wild. She also wants people to understand the great amount of diversity in raptors alone. "Raptors are barometers of the environmental food chain," she reminds people in her programs. Their diversity is key to that chain.

When asked about whether or not she hopes to instill a conservation ethic, Kate was clear that she feels people have to come to those conclusions on their own. She hopes that by giving people information on life histories and the realities of raptors' lives, people will start to think more in terms of the consequences of their own actions. She is not shy about telling people that the great horned owl, Bobo, was shot by humans, or that many raptors like those in her program suffer from vehicle collisions, poisoning, or electrocution. "Even without us, raptors would have a high mortality rate," she says, but she thinks it helps people to make better choices if they're given all the facts.

Not only is Kate an educator and rehabilitator, she is also a consummate artist and well-known taxidermist. Her impressive array of work lines the walls of her home, and it is clear that her closeness with raptors informs her art. As I pored over the etchings and line drawings, I felt I was in a shrine devoted to the great hunters of the skies—eagles, falcons, hawks, owls. Kate's recent acquisition of nonprofit status for her organization gives her hope that this place, like many of the birds in her artwork, will finally soar. "Another ten years. That's what I'm hoping for." I followed her gaze to where a red-tailed hawk circles, riding the wind above this golden valley.

Photo by Jeremy Puckett

FEATURE

The Poison Wait

by Steve Rinella

The second of our features explores the mysterious world of mushroom hunting as Mr. Rinella shares his fascination with eating fungi.

Mr. Rinella is a non-fiction graduate student in the University of Montana's Creative Writing Program.

I have a childish anger for people with more money than I and it quickly rises above the film of my good intentions when they get to have something I don't. The big stuff, like dental insurance and expensive colleges on America's glimmering coasts, don't rile me up. What burns me are the subtle discrepancies, little bonuses that seem to haphazardly fall to the money side of society instead of my student-loan-grabbing hands. They drink from cool and bubbly bottles instead of flat, communal pitchers, which gets to me. They fly instead of bus, and that grates at my nerves. They never curse long, overdue, wadded up gas bills.

Considering all the wealthy advantages I hunger for, it's the culinary ones biting hardest. I had good wine once and didn't know the first thing about how to recognize it. The only octopus to ever grace my tongue got there by way of my shrimp net during a salty, damp night in the Florida Keys. I sauteed it over a white-gas camp stove in a pool of Land-O-Lakes and served it atop some saltine crackers. I'm not wallowing, though. These are just things I think when I walk through the woods in April with a couple hundred dollars' worth of morel mushrooms in my collecting basket. I'd never sell, but I know in New York a few distributors are running up their phone bills trying to get some for the big ticket restaurants during the truffle off-season. People whose lawn boys mow them down on their estates will pay big money for them in town. I think about this and get a nice, crisp redemption buzz.

Because wild mushrooms are simply there, they act as great equalizers, the Eugene Debs of the culinary world. I hand them out to neighbors like a disarmed Robin Hood, though I know they'll fry black in vegetable oil and get dumped into canned spaghetti sauce. It's just important to me that everyone get a taste of something the pyramid system of capitalism would keep out of their hands if

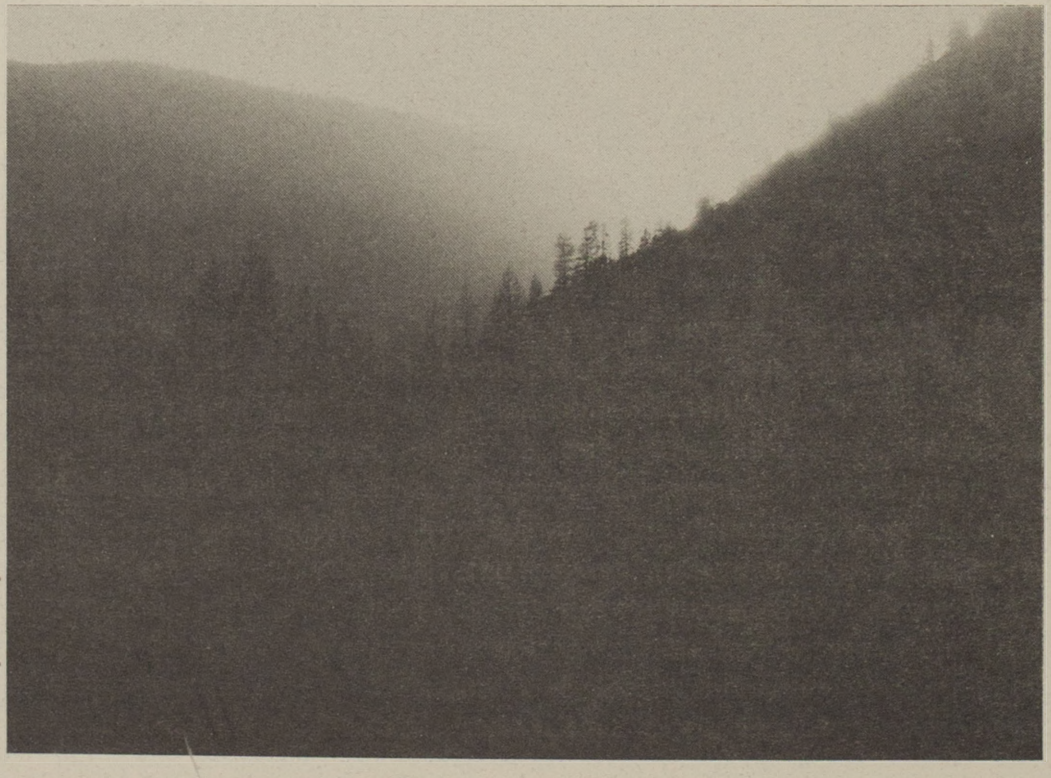


Photo by Jeremy Puckett

at all possible. Beyond the obvious selling point of a unique, otherworldly flavor, wild mushrooms are sought by the rich because they're hard to grow. If it's hard to get, the logic goes, call it a delicacy, drink with wine. Dry, please.

The desirable portion of a fungus, what we call a mushroom, is only a fruit, or macrofructation, put forth by a hidden, tree-like body called a mycelium. Depending on the species, mycelium can live beneath the soil, on dead stumps, on living trees, and even park benches. While different species can grow in many different places, they do tend to be particular about picking their own locales. Of the several thousand species of mushrooms, only a few have been brought under the reign of agriculture with widespread success. Most notable of these is the common white mushroom, that girl-next-door of the mushroom world, the picket-fence-white staple you find on your t-bone at the local roadhouse, or scoop under sneeze guards at $3.99 all-you-can-eat salad bars. They're about as close to a wild specimen as a wax museum dummy is to a nineteenth-century Plains Indian. They come in a plastic box with a recipe thrown in on top. The brain recognizes this and knows that the words mushroom and wild mushroom have as much in common as the words their and there.

The other couple thousand species are the wild growing ones, the boldest of table fares. They take the shapes of erections, brains, and coral reefs; the hues of the sun and the tomb; the textures of everything felt when the hand passes up a woman's thigh to the union, or pets a shark, tail to gill, or soothes a cow udder. They grow from flower beds and dog shit, perimeters of hospitals and the Pentagon, strip mines and mountain slopes. The way they shun farmers keeps in tune with their history of perplexing humans.

My first memorable encounter with a mushroom was just outside my childhood bathtub. It rose up from the little crack between the baseboard and the carpet, mocking my mother, the homemaker. The pale skin stem came straight out first, then curved like a jumping fish, climbing the baseboard with a ridged umbrella cap riding high. Another, much smaller one joined it at its base, but the tall one was the repulsing spectacle, so sneaky and fast to get up that high when we weren't looking.

My mother plucked it with wads of toilet paper, spooled off not three feet from the murder sight, and threw it like it was a squashed spider into the wicker wastebasket. She yelled for quite a surprising length of time about no more splashing in the tub or drying off on the carpet. Turned out to be a cracked pipe inside the wall feeding the decay, but, when dealing with kids, shoot first. With quick pops of a screwdriver, she pried off the base board, revealing a cobwebbed and tangled mass of rootish things that wove all around in the wet, rotting wood of the wall.

"My God," sighed Mother.

Mushroom mycelium was

The other couple thousand [mushroom] species are the wild growing ones, the boldest of table fares. They take the shapes of erections, brains, and coral reefs; the hues of the sun and the tomb; the textures of everything felt when the hand passes up a woman's thigh to the union ...

In Norse myth, Odin's horse drips a frothy blood out of his mouth while racing across the sky evading devils. Mushrooms grow where it lands, the legend tells, but they can also pop up where the froth from a shower head hits.

everywhere. While I lived in her immaculate home, dodging as she vacuumed carpet, washed linoleum and wiped down baseboard, those white strands were doing their work of robbing the house's nutrients. Not until they had worked along three feet of the wall, decayed it's structure, rounded a corner, infiltrated the carpet strands and got at the wood beneath did we discover them. There is something both ironic and grotesque about a two-inch fungus macrofructation poking up in the room you do your grooming in. The most cruel punishment, the most dreadful joke, would have been putting that mushroom near my mouth. Its nature as a floor rotter, a household pest, removed it from even the possibility of edibility, no matter what any illustrated field guide said it was.

Humans can develop strange and strong aversions to mushrooms, due to their startling ability to seemingly pop up at random like the stray hairs I often pluck from my back. In Norse myth, Odin's horse drips a frothy blood out his mouth while racing across the sky evading devils. Mushrooms grow where it lands, the legend tells, but they can also pop up where the froth from a shower head hits. All the better if it's dark. Fungi have no chlorophyll, so they draw nutrients from other organic materials, not the sun. Christian mythology leaves the mushroom untouched, so the force that keeps most Americans a little skeptical runs deeper than religion. I would say we come pre-wired to steer cautiously, if not clear, around fungus. Selective pressure, I maintain, works to weed out interesting experimentation, mushroom-wise or otherwise. White bread, diet cola, and turkey slices, with their constant testaments to our reluctance to sample, are here to stay.

From that early, innate fear, the mushroom makes quite a journey through our minds before it moves from the crazy, bad thing category, over to food. The bathroom incident was one step in the voyage through mine. The next was throwing them at the neighbor girls, then stuffing them in mail boxes, then encouraging my pet dog to try a taste, on and on, until I began putting stumpys in my mouth to be more like my boyhood hero, Daniel Boone.

My older brother, Matthew, is the person who finally proposed to me that the serious hunting and eating of wild mushrooms was a good thing to do. An agronomist by education, Matthew likes to see edibles rise up from the dirt, and he understands the mechanics. Coupled with his childhood nature as hunter/gatherer, he has a drive and curiosity that propel him through forest and river bottoms searching for those things that manage just fine without help from his green thumb. With his field guide out in front of him like a combine, he can put more land miles behind himself in a day than the most ardent trail hiker can brag. Someone could know Matthew for over a year before finding out about his passion for mushrooming. Unlike the social cliques formed by outdoor sports like flyfishing, mountain biking, and skiing, there are no image reapings to be had from traipsing

about college campuses and microbrew pubs dressed like you're ready for the mushroom search when in actuality you're heading for work or school, home, then bed. Mushrooming is something done for the self and you're no more likeable for the pursuit than if you chase particularly pointed icicles. The most skilled, advertisement-savvy photographer couldn't turn it into something to sell as sunglasses or autos. In fact, the only people pulling a buck out of mushroom hunters are the mycophagists behind a scattering of mushroom cookbooks and I.D. manuals.

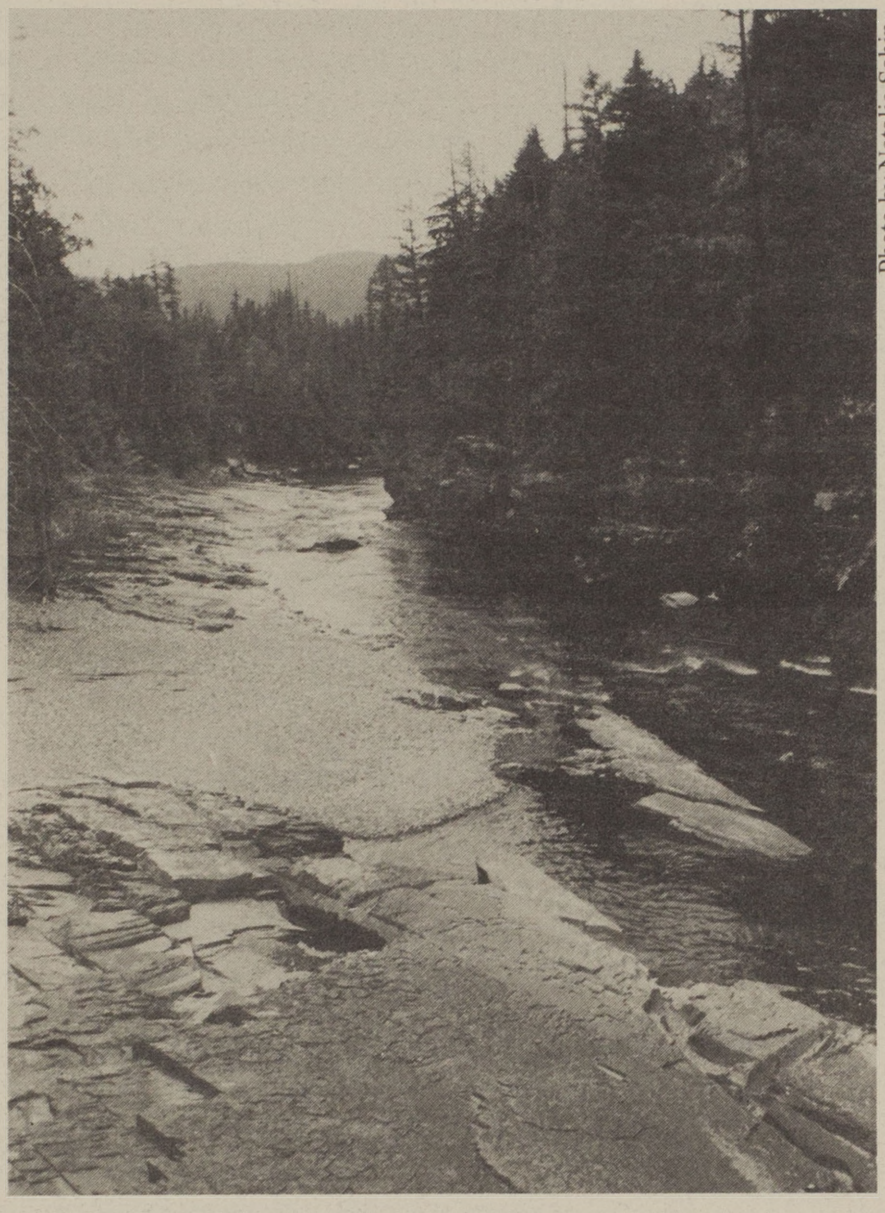


Photo by Natalie Sabin

Despite my start, inspired by big brother, I've found searching out wild mushrooms to be on my own level by now. The sport's practical edge (you eat them) fills me with a productive giddiness that my Methodist upbringing forced me to foster and love. You can be good at it, too. Hunting mushrooms and cooking them in an appealing way takes not a small amount of studying and focused concentration. Topography, hydrology, meteorology, actually about every -ology, plays into an effective pursuit. Whenever I travel through other regions, I check a field manual to see what edibles are available then and there.

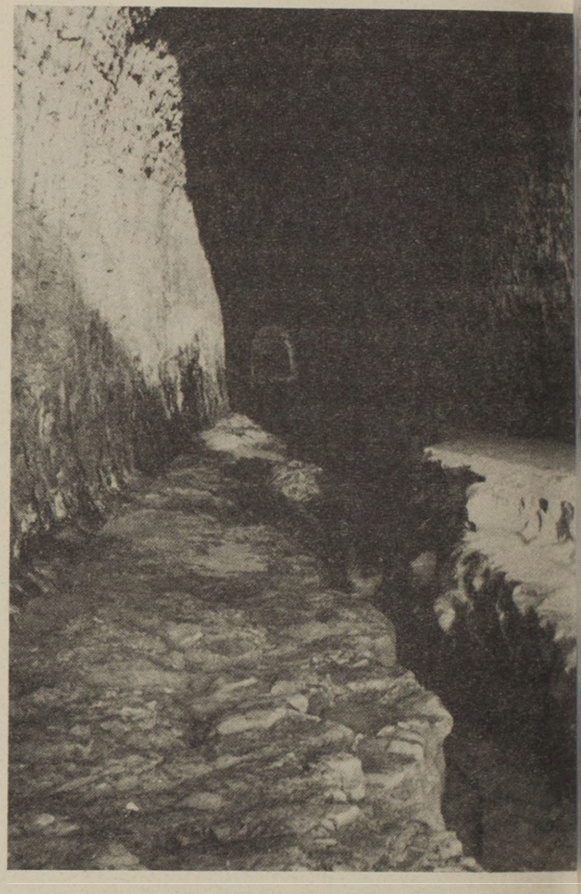
Most guides quantify the quality of a mushroom as either deadly, poisonous, questionable, edible with caution, edible, edible and good (which I call E.G.s), or edible and choice (E.C.s). Mushrooms containing psilocybin are listed as poisonous, but it's a friendlier toxin that can produce wild hallucinations at best or some nausea and a hospital visit at worst. When planning a hunt in new areas, I read up on the available E.TG.s and E.C.s. The straight Es tend to be a little boring, but when mixed in with some sauce or fried with onions, pepper and garlic, a good E isn't all bad. A friend of mine recently moved to Alabama and, because he's observant

All bodies differ when it comes to processing wild mushrooms. What your mom can eat all day might have you sick on her kitchen floor. So you're never sure enough until it's where you can't get at it: through your teeth, down your throat, and nestled in, acid working it.

and reads, hits some kind of fungus or another twelve months a year when most hunters do it once in spring and again in fall because they simply don't know what's out there.

I moved to Montana for school, but my decision tilted to the area for the outdoor possibilities. My second night in town I got to talking with a girl in a bar that just happened to have the same major as me at the university. She had a partially cut off finger that I asked about. To my great joy, the question didn't offend her, she liked to shoot pool, and she didn't try to impress me with the usual who's-read-most competitive conversation. The real hook for me, though: she liked to scrounge around the woods for things to eat. We planned a mushroom hunting trip into Idaho for the next weekend, which would be followed by a day of cutting and dehydrating our catch. After buying some supplies, my new friend Hester and I drove over and camped out in my van beneath the mid-September rains along the wet, rotting slopes that drop down into the Saint Joe River.

Western Montana can be oppressively arid to a boy from Western Michigan, where cumulonimbus clouds roll off the Great Lakes like ghost ships running aground on a daily schedule. However, just west of my new home, across the Bitterroot Range Divide, the land gets frequent dumpings because the high altitude pressure changes pull out water. The drive over pays off. In two days, we collected several large cooler loads containing samples of seven edible varieties, with only a few that Hester and I were familiar with. In the evening of the third day, on a cook stove propped over a stump, we sauteed some of three species in melted butter and boiled an artichoke while snacking on chips and salsa. Again and again we checked our field guides, noting season, spore prints, technical descriptions and field details, making dead sure, labeling samples for the guy



that finds us to give to the doctor. Or the coroner.

All bodies differ when it comes to processing wild mushrooms. What your mom can eat all day might have you sick on her kitchen floor. So you're never sure enough until it's where you can't get at it: through your teeth, down your throat, and nestled in, acid working it. With most poisons, it's a sure thing within a couple of

hours. Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea kick in quickly. Usually, that's it. But if you've eaten a heavy dosage of amanitin, found in the aptly labeled death cap (Amanita phalloides, which, in some conditions, I've been told, can look a lot like common edibles) you're in for a whole other voyage from a short remission. While the wild food chef assumes he's out of

Photo by Shelly Truman

the figurative woods the woods put him in, he has quite another affair going on inside.

Amanitin can shut down his body's protein production. This throws him into hormonal and structural upheaval. What can hit him first is renal failure, jaundice, then full blown hepatitis, coma and death.

Amanitin is some powerful medicine, the mushroom cloud of mushroom poisons, surely what laced Snow White's apple. There are many others: orellanin, muscarine, ibotenic acid, coprine, monomethylhydrazine. A lot of chemical names that don't mean a thing until a toxicologist jams through her manuals as you flop like a popcorn popper through doors of a trauma center, spitting up samples that look a lot like nothing she's ever come across.

My brother, Matthew, and I were hunting yellow morels (morchella esculenta) amongst the scattered elm trees of Michigan's Muskegon County and ran into another guy at an entrance to a national forest. He was just jumping into a rusted pickup and we asked what was up.

"Did pretty good on the morels," he said, offering his sack for inspection and ignoring both the logical and superstitious taboo against revealing any information concerning mushroom whereabouts.

Matt took a peek. "Those aren't morels, man."

"Like hell they're not."

"They're not, though," returned Matt. He held one up to him. "They're beefsteaks. You know, false morels. You found them in conifers, right? I wouldn't be playing around with that shit."

"Thanks, buddy, but I'll eat 'em for morels."

That fellow had an interesting personality, we later agreed. I'd like to ask him how his evening went.

The reality of poison's existence, the true myth of the poison mushroom, is something every

Continued on page 34

Amanitin can shut down his body's protein production. This throws him into hormonal and structural upheaval. What can hit him first is renal failure, jaundice, then full blown hepatitis, coma and death. Amanitin is some powerful medicine ...

Camas, Vol. 2, No. 4 [1999], Art. 1

Game Farm Debates

by Jay Nichols

After much debate over a proposed elk ranch southwest of Whitefish, Mont., the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) is completing an environmental assessment of the ranch.

Grant Spoklie, son of state representative Bob Spoklie, R-Kalispell, has asked FWP to allow him to manage an elk farm where up to 30 animals would be kept on a privately-owned 81 acre ranch. According to Spoklie, part of his operation will be a shooting preserve in which mature bull elk will be available for killing, priced up to $20,000 each.

Photo by Sarah Heim-Jonson

Game farms are common in Montana and not all provide hunters with the opportunity to bag a trophy kill. Some, like the Triple-D outside of Kalispell, cater to photographers looking to get the shot of a lifetime. Elk farms, such as Spoklie's, generate revenue from the Asian market paying high prices for antlers, consumers interested in wild game as a low-cholesterol alternative to beef, and hunters willing to pay to hunt on private land.

While these "canned hunts" clearly question hunting ethics, state wildlife officials can only base their decisions on the facts. Karen Zackheim, a game specialist with FWP, stated, "We don't have the leeway to look at likes and dislikes. We have to look at the science, and that's where the decisions will be made." The science, of course, is double-edged – political and environmental – the two inexorably linked.

Game farm proponents accuse the opposition of overlooking private property rights and an individual's right to conduct business, while opponents accuse game farm operators of endangering public safety and native populations of game animals. In the past some game farms have had a drastic impact on waterways, removed critical winter ranges for native animals, and disrupted traditional seasonal migration corridors.

Genetic dilution and disease transmission are problems inherent to the controversial game farm business. Wildlife experts have testified that dense populations in enclosed areas, as found on game farms, create a hotbed for diseases such as tuberculosis, which can spread to wild animals, livestock, and people. Game farm animals are subject to regular testing for various diseases to avoid infecting wild deer and elk. Proponents argue that testing methods are inaccurate and reports of disease outbreak and cross-breeding are false alarms. Chancy Ralls, a game farm operator near Hamilton for over 40 years once said, "I have better health records on my game animals than I do on my kids."

As the overall debate continues, any final decision on the proposed Whitefish elk farm will depend on the upcoming EA.

Forest Service Road Moratorium

by Sarah W. Heim-Jonson

Mike Dombeck, United States Forest Service (USFS) Chief, has told the American public that: "There are few more irreparable marks we can leave on the land than to build a road ..." In support of his proclamation, the USFS announced an 18-month moratorium on road building in most roadless areas on the National Forests. This administrative action is on the books as of March 1, 1999 in the Federal Register.

Although the USFS *proposed* the moratorium last year, it did not put the plan into action until now. Over the last year, the USFS invited public comment concerning the suggested moratorium. After receiving thousands of comments from all 50 states, the USFS issued the most recent administrative action.

Several reasons are given to explain the need for the road moratorium. First, the USFS plans to revamp its National Forest Transportation System (which includes road building) and believes that it must reconsider its road policy extensively before building new ones. The moratorium will remain in place until the transportation system plan is finished or the 18 months is up. Other reasons include: insufficient funds to maintain roads (60% are not maintained for public safety) and environmental degradation (soil erosion into rivers and riparian habitats).

Roads were first built throughout the National Forests in order to "get the cut out." In the 1950s, 14,000 vehicles per day were using roads for timber harvesting. In 1990, vehicle numbers jumped to 42,000 per day. Miles and miles of roads were built to accomodate the huge number of vehicles and timber harvests in the forests. In 1996, however, vehicles on forest roads for timber harvest fell back down to 15,000. The USFS perceived the need to balance the declining numbers of timber-related vehicles with the increasing number of recreational users on roads. Estimated numbers of recreating vehicles (hikers, fishermen, tourists) on forest roads per day run up to 1,706,000. As more people use forest roads for recreation the USFS must decide which ones to close and which ones to maintain at safety standards.

Considering the dilemmas surrounding present roads many wonder why the USFS would consider building more. The main reason remains timber production. In order to remove cut trees, foresters must be able to access them. Roads are the easiest method although helicopter logging is also used in some locations. In defense of the moratorium to opponents, the USFS contends that little desirable timber remains in roadless areas.

Proponents of protecting roadless areas, on the other hand, argue that the areas are not fully protected despite the moratorium.

Bethanie Walder, of Wildlands Center for Preventing Roads in Missoula, Mont., cautions that while the moratorium is a step in the right direction, it is only a very small one. Walder suggests that a significant long-term roads policy would consider all roads on all USFS lands—the present action does not include some roadless areas in the Pacific Northwest, Alaska, or other regions. Furthermore, Walder points out that although road construction may cease in roadless areas, other harmful activities (resource extraction, helicopter logging, and off-road vehicle use) need to end as well in order to fully protect roadless areas.

A final decision on the USFS roads policy should arrive sometime in the fall of 2000. For more information on the moratorium, access the USFS website at: http://www.fs.fed.us/news/roads. To find out more about Wildlands Center for Preventing Roads, access http://www.wildrockies.org/WildCPR/.

Native American Legislation

by Emily Miller

The names of places are often clues to their past. In the case of Montana, some place names reveal the state's natural or human history--take Trapper Peak, the Bitterroot, or the Blackfoot River. But sometimes names do more than describe a place; they reveal elements of history that should not be celebrated. This is also the case in Montana. If a Native American-led proposal in the Montana Legislature this session is successful, the names of several places in Montana will change for the better, according to many Indian and non-Indian Montanans.

At issue is the word "squaw," an extremely derogatory term in many Indian languages. This word, derived from a disrespectful term for female genitalia, was adopted by American settlers and slapped onto several sites in Montana as well as throughout the country. While many non-Indians are not aware of the meaning or connotations of the word, the issue is a pressing one to many tribal members—and legislators. Rep. Carol Juneau, D-Browning, is sponsoring a bill this session, HB412, that would require Montana to officially remove the offending term from all place names where it now occurs.

This year there are four tribal members serving on the legislature. Beyond the place-names proposal, these representatives are pursuing several other issues in Montana's legislature that focus on ecomomic and community development for Native Americans, and are especially important for the state's Native American population. These bills include a proposal that would give Indian tribes 7 percent of the federal sporting goods excise tax, and a bill that would allow school districts to show preference toward Indians in the hiring process. Also, though not yet in bill form, is a proposal by Bill Eggers, D-Crow Agency, that would entitle Montana's Native American tribes to 7 percent of the state's 20-year, $385-million settlement from tobacco companies. Eggers argues that Montana's Native Americans not only paid the tax on cigarettes they bought, but have higher smoking rates than the general population, and are therefore entitled to a fair cut of the money.

Votes on these issues, excepting the Eggers proposal, are expected this legislative session.

Photo by Shelly Truman

MUD: Living Wild in the City

by Rick Stern

Demonstrate? What the heck is it you demonstrate anyway? Ask the nagging demons in my head whenever I try to construct a concise rap to explain the work of the Missoula Urban Demonstration Project, or MUD, where I work and live.

Immediately, familiar phrases offer themselves from the nether area of MUD newsletters and press releases of old: MUD demonstrates self-reliant urban living; MUD works with people and communities to meet their basic needs in less resource-intensive ways; and MUD teaches people to live in a high-quality lifestyle while reducing their reliance on precious natural resources.

All these descriptions are accurate, I admit, but do they fully explain what MUD does? To answer this question, no. The remedy is to offer a more extensive explanation and some background on who MUD is and what it does.

The Missoula Urban Demonstration project lives on three lots on Missoula's North side. The site was purchased in the late 1970s by local folks wanting to go "back to the land" in an urban setting. In 1980 they formed the Down Home Project, still MUD's parent non-profit organization, to educate the public about the possibilities of self-reliant urban living. In 1984, they created the Northside Community Gardens (which remain at their original site) at the corner of Cooley and Holmes. During the 1980s several non-profit groups were included under the larger Down Home Project umbrella.

However, in the mid-1980s, two spurs of the Down Home Project—Garden City Seeds and the Bitterroot Down Home Project—vacated the site for Hamilton, MT, leaving a lull in the activity at the original demonstration site. That all changed in 1990 when a group of enterprising young graduate students from the Environmental Studies Program at the University of Montana formed MUD. As of 1999, MUD is the only organization still included in the original Down Home Project

Over the past nine years MUD has included a lot of what was originally done at the site: organic gardening, weekend workshops (on everything from composting to brewing your own beer), maintaining the Northside Community Gardens (in collaboration with Garden City Harvest for the last few years), and demonstrating a lifestyle which is fairly light on the land. These are things we'll continue to do this year, and as long as there is MUD.

Of course MUD has also expanded its operations around town including: lessons on gardening, composting, and paper-making in local schools, the North Missoula Tool Library (which has recently celebrated its first anniversary), and two summer camp sessions of MUDCamp. MUD's growing involvement in the community at large includes being involved in numerous community collaboratives such as the North Missoula Housing Partnership, Project Playground, and Montana Shares, among others in an effort to make Missoula an even better place to live.

MUD contends that a high-quality lifestyle can involve not only minimal resource consumption, but also feature a great variety and large quantity of pure, unadulterated fun. Our recent MUDdi Gras celebration exemplified this outlook, as does our annual Llama Manure Sale fundraiser, and our summertime Garden Party (July 25th this year—mark your calendars!).

Believe it or not, this explanation only skims the surface of what the Missoula Urban Demonstration project demonstrates. To learn more, stop by the MUD site at 619-629 Phillips Street any weekday afternoon, or call at (406) 721-7513. We're always happy to give tours, and to demonstrate our ideas about having fun while living wild in the city.

Science Under Siege: The Politician's War on Nature and Truth

by Todd Wilkinson
Johnson Printing, 1998

Reviewed by Ron Scholl

If *combat biologist* conjures up some egg head bug-lover in fatigues and helmet crawling across the forest floor with field guide in one hand and assault rifle in the other, the conceit wouldn't be too farfetched. But the scientists 'profiled in courage' in Todd Wilkinson's *Science Under Siege: The Politicians' War on Nature and Truth* don't face battle with the forces of nature. They suffer a far more perfidious force—politics.

Wilkinson's expose samples the spectrum of public land management in shining daylight on the little known struggles of committed scientists—few of whom considered themselves environmentalists with a cause, much less radicals—trying to do their job: conduct good research on behalf of public interest. When the research was ignored or quashed in management decisions, the unlikely heroes in this book decided to speak up, only to face censorship and career-threatening retribution. More to the point, say these scientists, the public trust was violated, and public land, water and wild species have suffered.

An acclaimed journalist from Bozeman, Wilkinson profiles in his first book scientists that include some that filled tour of duties in western Montana and nearby.

For Al Espinosa, former lead fish biologist on Idaho's Clearwater National Forest, the loss of native species such as bull trout due to erosion following heavy clearcutting "is a symbol of government destruction and abandonment of ethics." Deemed "the original combat biologist," Espinosa decried the corruption of science by political science.

Referring to bureaucrats in the agency as wanting "Stepford wives", "lobotomized specialists," and "biostitutes," Espinosa quit the agency after 19 years to become an independent consultant.

Science Under Siege gives voice to seven other key civil servants: a US Fish and Wildlife Service wildlife biologist; a Utah Department of Wildlife Resources herpetologist; an EPA pollution specialist; a National Parks speleologist; a BLM hydrologist; a US Geological Survey soils geologist; and Jeff DeBonis, founder of the Association of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics and, after leaving the agency, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility.

Science Under Siege emphasizes the role such whistleblower groups have had in supporting the scientists suffering the inevitable fallout of valuing truth over self-preservation. These men, and many lesser-known reluctant soldiers, share much in common. To kill the message, kill the messenger; ruin the scientist and you ruin the science. Uniformly, the whistleblowers were isolated, intimidated, threatened with transfer, pushed toward desk jobs, laid off, and some even prosecuted.

"The goal..." says one critic, "is to prove that no one is safe." In fact, a reoccurring analogy in the book compares agency bureaucracies and political machinations as reminiscent of Soviet-style prohibitions and inefficiencies: reward the status quo and punish initiative.

Wilkinson hardly offers equal time for critics of the whistleblowers and their issues, but as he argues, his book speaks for those who have been effectively silenced. His detailed research and analysis add a matrix and continuity to present a better understanding of the theater of battle in public land management that continues today.

Calling science "a moral compass for making the right decision," *Science Under Siege* argues convincingly that public agencies have lost sight of true north.

Women on Hunting

Edited by Pam Houston
The ECCO Press, 1995

Reviewed by Hilary Wood

It would be a simple statement to say that this is a book about hunting. That would not make it unusual, even though it is written by women, but the same as any number of anthologies providing discourse on the subject. But *Women on Hunting* is not so much about the act of hunting, the finding, stalking, and killing, as it is about using these actions as metaphors. Many of the female authors have never touched a gun, while others have handled them their entire lives. For some, hunting is a form of evil, a carelessness and cruelty which reveals to what extent the human race has disconnected itself from its animal origins. To others it is a deeply ingrained part of being human, the challenge and storytelling an integral part of our culture, and of every culture on earth. Yet, despite their differences, each of the forty-seven poets and writers joined in this anthology have chosen to use the subject of hunting as their medium. A medium which never fails to reveal the moral ambiguities surrounding the taking of an animal life.

Which one of us has not been touched by hunting? For editor Pam Houston, the answer is no one. Hunting is far more than the ritualistic process of pursuit, more than the taking of life to fill the stewpots or space on the livingroom wall: "If hunting can be like war it can also be like opera, or like fine wine. It can be like out-of-body travel, it can be like the suspension of disbelief. Hunting can be all these things and more; like a woman, it won't sit down and be just one thing." With this complexity in mind, Houston brings together a wide diversity of writings which, like the sport they describe, are twisting and elusive, refusing to be pinned down.

In her essay "Full Cry," Jane Smiley examines the often dormant desire for the hunt which she claims inhabits each of us, both men and women. Her character is a young girl, in love with horses and eager to learn about the ritualistic blood sport of fox hunting. The fact that her favorite horse breaks a leg in the chase and that the final objective of the hunt is torn limb from limb by the hounds, does not deter her from being "blooded," or participating in future hunts. Instead, it is not until college, with its education and restraints, that the woman shuns hunting. This decision, however, does not represent a complete separation from the sport, as is viewed in Smiley's closing paragraph, "My present horse is also a thoroughbred though, and I sometimes sense beneath his self-restraint that inbred urge to GO, to join the galloping herd, to be caught up in headlong forward motion. And I sometimes sense that inborn urge in myself, too."

And yet the horrors of hunting, the anguish and death that naturally accompany the sport, often bring humanity's disconnection and lack of compassion into sharp focus. Without any reverence for the prey, these deaths show how cruel people can be. In "Three Poems From Cora Fry," Rosellen Brown writes of the muskrat, alone in a delirium of pain as it chews its paw free from a trap, where the next day the trapper, disappointed with only a leg, "cracks your bone, / wishbone easy, / in his tight fist. / The leg sails, lands / on leaves, becomes / a crooked twig, / or an inchworm. / They turn to lunch."

Built upon the combined efforts of accomplished writers such as Louise Erdrich, Annie Dillard, and Margaret Atwood, *Women on Hunting* presents a compilation of experience and meditation on the subject of hunting: what it means for animals and what, ultimately, it means for us. Whatever your views may be, an avid hunter or strict vegetarian, there is more here for you to learn and much that you may recognize.

Varmints

by Doug Hawes-Davis
University of Texas Press, 1998

Reviewed by Mary Anne Peine

It's true, we love to see 'em blow up. You know—explode them dogs."

When most of us think of hunting, we think of seasons and licenses, of big game and bag limits. But not all hunting is governed by these sorts of laws. There is a catagory of wildlife for which there is no season and no limit. These animals, known as varmints, include such maligned critters as coyotes, prairie dogs, groundhogs, foxes, and crows.

In his new documentary, *Varmints*, Doug Hawes-Davis takes a fascinating look at the fate of one of these animals in the American West—the prairie dog. Through interviews with ranchers, hunters, environmentalists, agency employees, grassland ecologists, and outfitters, Hawes-Davis artfully unravels the controversy surrounding this unassuming little rodent, leaving viewers to ponder serveral unanswered questions about the ethics of hunting for sport and our relentless efforts to manipulate the natural world.

Although they are a keystone species in grassland ecosystems, prairie dogs have been the focus of eradication efforts for decades. Ranchers insist that prairie dogs compete with cattle for forage and that livestock can break their legs in prairie dog holes. While ecologists question these claims agriculturalists and hunters use them as justification to poison and shoot prairie dogs with wild abandon. In the plains states, prairie dogs occupy only one million acres, about 2% of their original range.

The most compelling, unbelievable, and sometimes humorous moments of the film revolve around the highly controversial issue of prairie dog hunting. Hawes-Davis introduces viewers to several varmit hunters, including Mark Mason, a Colorado hunter who considers himself a member of a "true militia." Mason continues, "We are called to defend these lands from the invaders, which in this case are the rodents." He and other shooters assert they are performing a public service by getting rid of these unwanted pests. Mason boasts that he once shot 87 prairie dogs in two hours. Janet Parker of the Varmint Hunters Association states that shooting prairie dogs is no different than catching mice in a trap. She says, "We believe in being humane in the taking of animals. We're as big of an animal lover as anybody else."

This killing of animals for target practice rather than for meat raises ethical red flags for others interviewed in the film. Bob Luce, of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, says, " ... there's a lot of difference between the sportsman who goes out to hunt a deer or elk that he's going to take care of and use as his winter meat supply, versus a person who goes out and shoots prairie dogs just for the sport of killing something." While the film effectively articulates this moral dilemma, it doesn't shove a resolution down the viewer's throat. The film allows the facts to speak for themselves and leaves viewers to draw their own conclusions.

All told, *Varmints* is a powerful, engaging, and surprisingly humorous expose of the strained relations between people and wildlife in the American West. The film has no narrator, but instead allows people on all sides of the issue to speak for themselves. Hawes-Davis has woven together interviews, historical footage, and music brilliantly, leading viewers gracefully through the various dimensions of a complex issue. Just as *Southbound*, his last film about chip mills in the Southeast, continues to make an impact in southern states, the unsettling story told in *Varmints* is sure to echo across the West for years to come.

For more information about the film, contact High Plains Films at (406) 543-6276, or dhd@wildrockies.org.

Malcolm Brooks continued from page 15

wounded and vanish seemingly by evaporation. Once I killed a bird that flushed as energetically as any, only to find during cleaning that it had apparently sustained and recovered from major trauma to its entire breast. Old, heavy lacerations had scarred over into jagged creases, and a puncture wound from some unknowable source—coyote? bird dog? barbed wire?—had healed into a deep cleft resembling a misplaced orifice. A friend once downed a grouse while hunting without a dog, then spent the rest of the afternoon searching in vain. When he borrowed a Lab and returned the next morning, he found the bird still on the run a half-mile from where he'd shot it.

Grouse are a major staple of most predators, yet continue to endure.

My bad shot was not, as you can probably gather, a Road-to-Damascus episode to make me rethink my position on hunting. It does however simply make me think—about the nature of my passions, about the birds themselves and my relationship to them, about the habitat they depend upon for their own survival, about the importance of ritual in a culture increasingly cut off from the gritty realities that foster it. It makes me think I want to do better next time. I still want Henrietta to know what it's like when it all comes together.

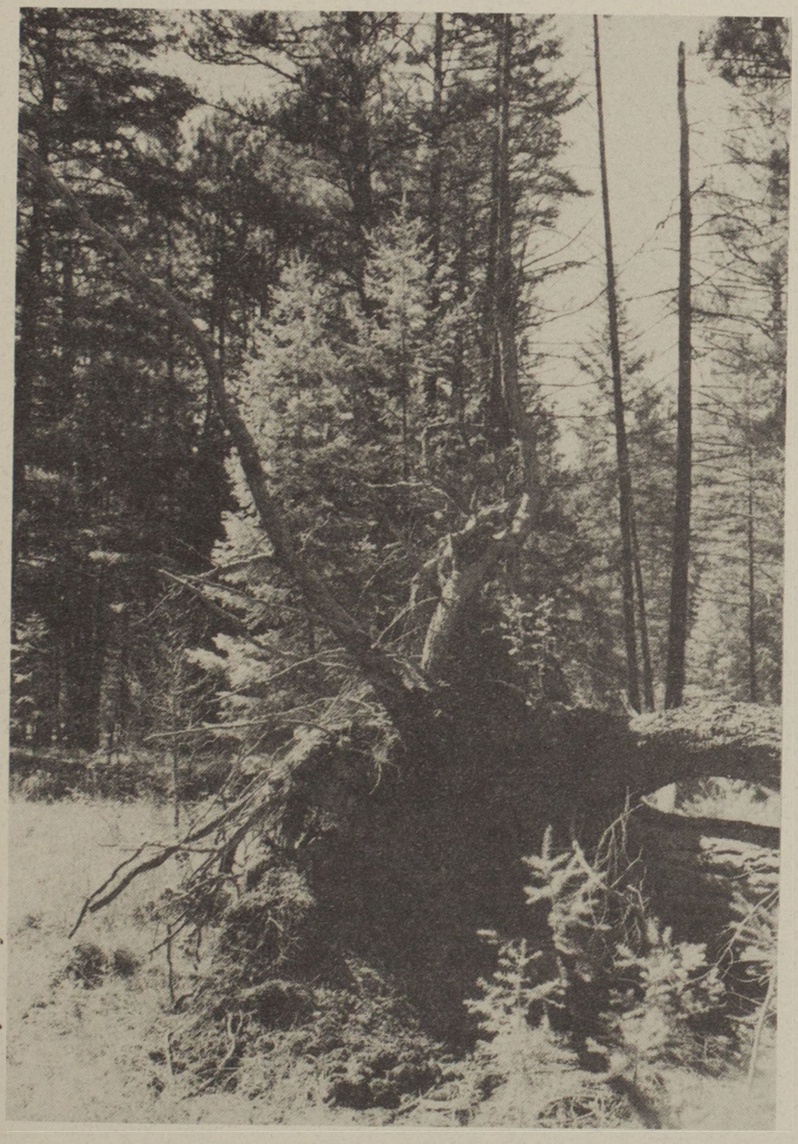


Photo by Jeremy Puckett

If grouse shooting—the single trip-trigger moment of truth—depends upon an absence of thought and a purity of action, then grouse hunting—the miles of walking for each flush, the totality of the experience with dogs and guns, educated guesswork, and empirical study—is about nothing if *not* comtemplation. Somewhere between the two resides an absolute truth. The bird on the table acts as more than one kind of sustenance.

I pinned the severed tail fan to a sheet of cardboard, covering the nub of flesh at the base with table salt. Later, when it had cured, I placed the fan on a shelf with a found bird's nest, a shed antler, a dead butterfly, a chunk of polished driftwood. I look at these things now, totems of the world beyond the limits of town, and see them as integers in a vastly larger equation.

I want to work the equation out. I want to make this, like hunting itself, a natural state of being.

THE POISON WAIT *continued from page 25*

devoted mycologist carries around in his or her collection sack, despite whatever analysis techniques may be used. The Greeks were avid truffle eaters and gathered other edible varieties, but not without caution and error. Four hundred years before the birth of Christ the playwright Euripides wrote the account of a woman and her family who "strangled of eating them." A collector that gathers one or two of the same varieties every spring next to the same neighbor's little patch of woods probably never tastes the fear, but get to traveling and experimenting and Mother Doubt will get tight hold of your stomach. In an adventuring sense, poisons make eating wild mushrooms part of the reckless outdoorship it is. Off-coast sailing is dangerous, as are third-world travel, and sex with strangers, and therein lies some immense appeal. Experienced thrill seekers never frequent roller coaster parks because the outcome is so boringly determined. No costly mistakes can be made. Posted in my brother's kitchen is a quote from John Gerard, who took a moment in 1597 to sum up his conclusions on mushrooms. "As for mushrooms, they are all very cold and moist therefore to approach unto a venemous and murthering facultie and ingender a clammy, pituitous, and cold nutriment if they be eaten. To conclude, few of them are good to be eaten, and most of them do suffocate and strangle the eater."

So, along the ghostly trail used by the Nez Perce as they fled reservation confinement, Hester and I ate a few bites of our mysterious find. We picked them off the cook stove with knife points, commenting on the flavor: the shaggy manes like asparagus but with more intriguing textures; the fried chicken mushrooms, to my great disappointment, not unlike fried chicken; gem-studded puff balls like what you'd get if you injected a marshmallow with something that got smiles out of adults but made kids sniffle and lock their jaws. Blackfeet braves dried these round mushrooms and strung the small balls around their necklines because they put off a delicate and pleasant odor. Lakota women rubbed them on their babies' navels after birth. For the most part, whites let them be.

The majority of what we found came from low areas right along the banks of the river. Those areas are scarce along Saint Joe. Most of the banks are rock slides or cliffs shooting into the water, and not much but lichen grows on them.

We found the puff balls and waxy caps by heading up small drainages into the mountains. Around the spring points, the ground sucks at your boots like getting the last ketchup out of a squeeze bottle. Those are good areas to check out. For the less hearty gourmands, backyards, cemeteries, golf courses, and wood lots are good locale too. To locate shaggy manes, dangle out the window and have someone drive logging roads and county lanes at twenty miles an hour. You can't miss them; they love the roadside grass. One or two will be seen, then twenty more materialize in the stubble and vegetation clump. They tend to break apart when picked, but they can shove asphalt chunks and packed gravel aside like card houses. Shaggy mane collection should be done in the morning, because they push up in the night and will decay rapidly throughout the day. They quickly turn into purplish, uninviting and inky goop in the roadside sin.

After eating, Hester and I lay on a blanket next to the fire and waited for the Warrior Truth. The layover, the four hour wait, is the important moment in mushroom hunting. It's the best part of it all.

I used to live in a comfortably crowded house. A co-resident acquired a case of crabs. Due to obvious embarrassments, she held off with the news. We lived loosely, too: sharing towels, studying in one anothers' rooms, sitting on the couches in our underwear. It was a tense few days after she finally fessed up. Every itch that occurred in the genital regions of the inhabitants—itches that would usually be scratched, then ignored—send the

possessor running to the bathroom to investigate. The poison wait can be a lot like that.

"How long's it been?" I asked Hester shortly after finishing our meal.

"About fifteen minutes."

"Anything, at all?"

"I don't think so. But it's hard to tell. Might just be that beer. Buzzes kind of sneak up on me."

"What was that? Your stomach?"

"No, I think I'm just a little burpy."

"How long now?"

"Nineteen minutes, maybe eighteen."

"How you feel?"

"I can't tell. Just give me a minute. You're making me too damn nervous."

We were fine. Our relationship started on a healthy note. I haven't been hit yet by toxins. And I used to be pretty careless with forms I thought I was familiar with. Now I check everything, everytime. I saw a thirteenth-century fresco from France that depicts Adam and Eve with a stylized tree of life. A tongue flicking serpent's head is temptingly close to Eve's ear, fig leaves have been installed. The tree is easily interpreted as a giant, highly hallucinogenic and potentially poisonous fly agaric. This artist's perspective is a little more imaginative than our idea of the apple tree, which we also gave the task of enlightening Newton. I have to disagree with the long gone artist, though, and say Eden was mushroom free. If not, humanity would have never got off the ground, considering Adam and Eve's abandon for sampling things while humping around in the buff. The apple put them to work, the mushroom could have put them into the ground.

Despite whatever risks mushrooming entails for beginners, it's hard to walk around in the raining spring and fall forests without the curious and abounding feel that the idea of Eden evokes. Try to really open your eyes, look around. They're everywhere. Once you look at some, like blaze orange, phallic stinkhorns, golden pholiotas, or yellow fairy cups, you'll be struck by just how alien they look in their puritanical background of drab brown and forest green. Matthew says mushrooms are Mother Nature flashing you. When he comes across a nice king bolete, which get to be ten inches across and crimson like gashed flesh, he jumps around slapping his thighs, yelling "That is so fucked up. I mean, it looks so out of place. Look at that beautiful, scary, orange sponge looking thing. That is so fucked up. Damn, these things are neat. Look at that. Gorgeous."

Mushrooms are Mother Nature's best showing, her renaissance. They evoke a greater array of emotions and reactions than any living thing on Earth that can be chewed up and swallowed. I like mushrooms, for one, because they are obscenely expensive, greedily sought, and I get them free of charge. On my sincerest level, though, I need wild mushrooms because if I'm not excited about something I get very depressed and can't taste my own mouth or yearn for my own future, and finding beautiful things to eat out in the woods excites me. I believe, in a grossly cynical and difficult to defend way, the idea of happiness coming from within to be either a tricky construct of language, like the chicken or the egg, or simply bullshit. If joy is coming from within, it might, at times, be the tummy talking.

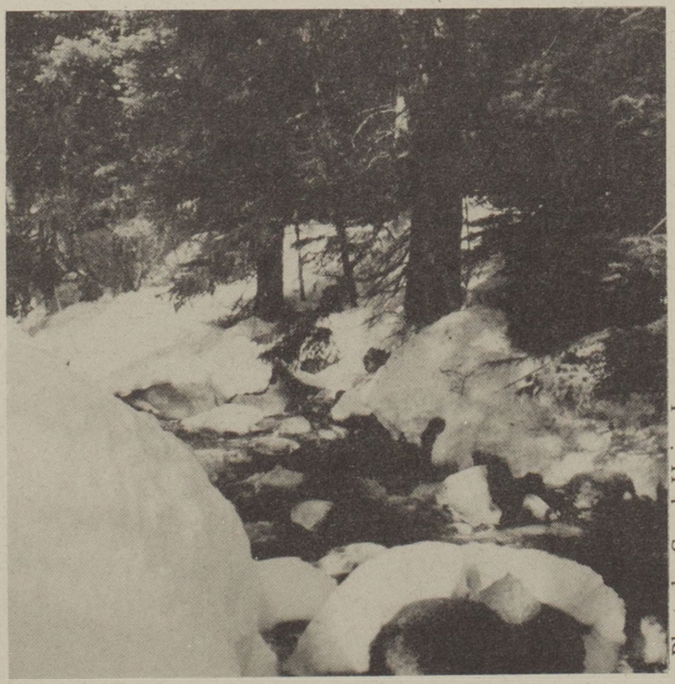


Photo by Sarah Heim-Jonson

Ian McCluskey continued from page 5

ditched the chair where you had found it. And walked away.

Remember how you thought of the wheel that spun a little crooked and the tear in the vinyl seat. Your boot heals echoed down the vacant street, knocking against dark windows. Maybe this town needs to be saved, or maybe you do. Or maybe there is too much that is torn and tattered. Everything that night, even the scraps of paper in rain gutters and the cracks in the pavement and the old dog asleep in the doorway, needed to be healed.

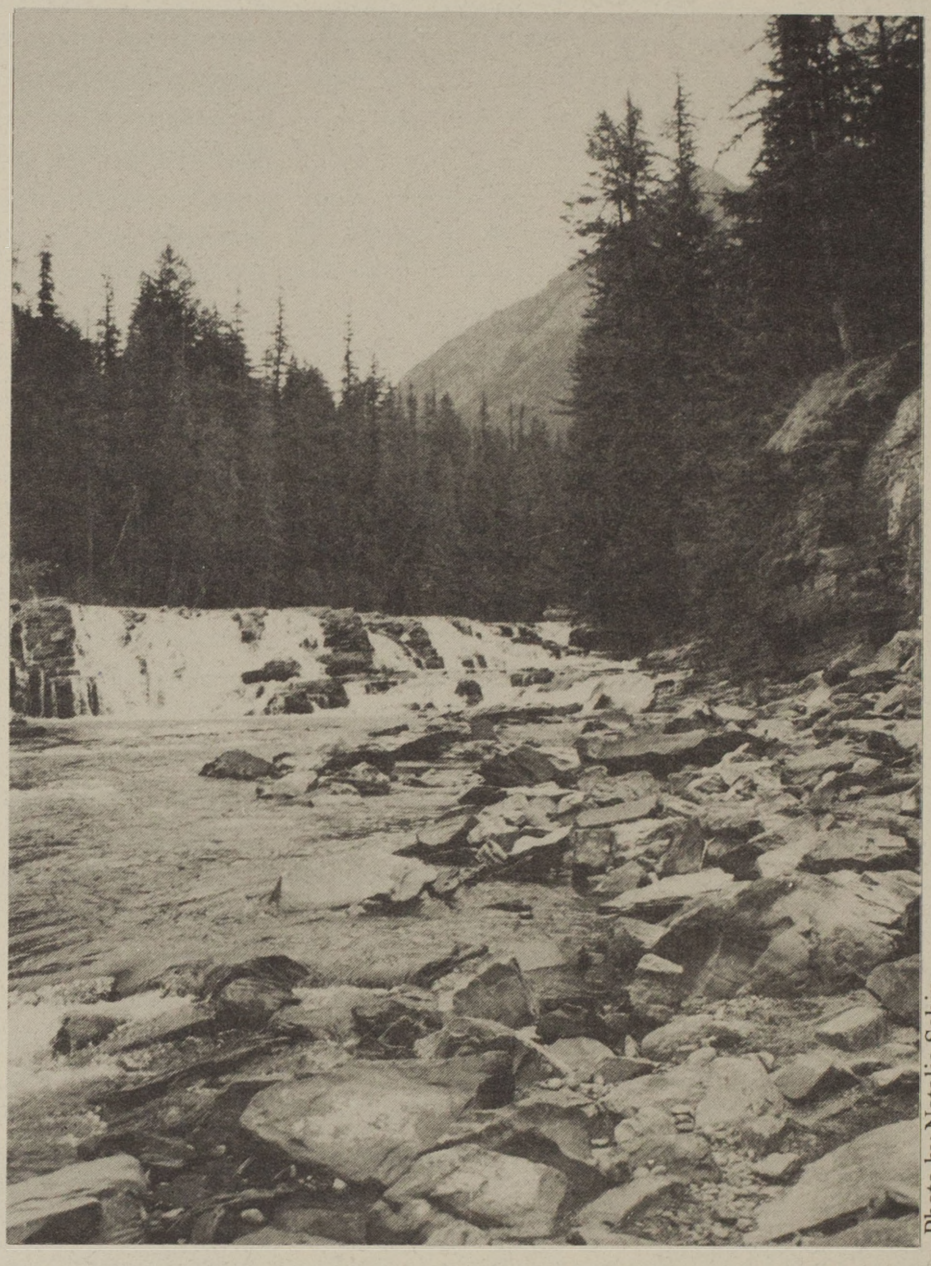


Photo by Natalie Sabin

III. Desire

The train tracks cut through Missoula, so does the highway. Pulls you, damn it. Makes you jump into a borrowed car and crank the radio, gulp warm of foam of Rainier Beer, find the edge of things. Race along a road as it ricochets through mountains. Tilt your head back and suck the scent of snow melting into slush. Pine trees clip across the windshield. The radio station crackles AM static with Johnny Cash songs for logging trucks hauling ass to Idaho. Pass flashes of neon signs, bars now opening. Buy a round in plastic to-go cups. Toss shoes wet from the river into the back. Pat the dog on the head, because his mood carries the trip.

If you had a map ... but you don't have a map. Still you know, from classrooms, that Lewis and Clark pushed west this way, that Joseph and his Dreamers fled east this way. You could stop and read the markers as you piss, but you don't. You're making history. You punch your buddy and declare: The only way to find something new is not to let it find you first. Tires kick gravel.

The sun peels back the clouds, makes the highway gleam. There is no maximum speed if you can see the sun; you'll drink to that. Be brave and foolish because the two need each other. Be bravely foolish and foolishly brave. And know that these days come only once.

Blackberry Picking on a Wooden Ladder

by Tammie Slater

Between Paradise and Bull River
a dead black bear cleaves
to the fresh red road. Her twenty claws
glisten with blood
in the truck driver's denim pockets.
He has peeled her coat away
and broken off her canines, her pink tongue
droops out of the side of her mouth.

On my way to Priest Lake, Idaho,
I want to stop and look at the bear.
This bear is the only real bear
I have ever seen. I want to see the bear's spirit rise,
growl, and lumber away to the blue,
distant mountains across the street.
I want to watch the bear
drag me with her into a cave where snow falls
and buries the entrance.

It is then I taste smoked salmon.
The salty, charred crosses of pink flesh
disintegrate on my tongue. I pull
the blackberry beads off their brown stems
while my grandmother scolds me for crushing the fruit
from high on her blackberry ladder, straddling
a blackberry wall. I swallow September:
the blackberry pies, jams, and spiced jellies
rotting on a basement shelf with open lids. My grandmother
climbs down, takes my hands, investigates the black juice that stains
a young girl eating.

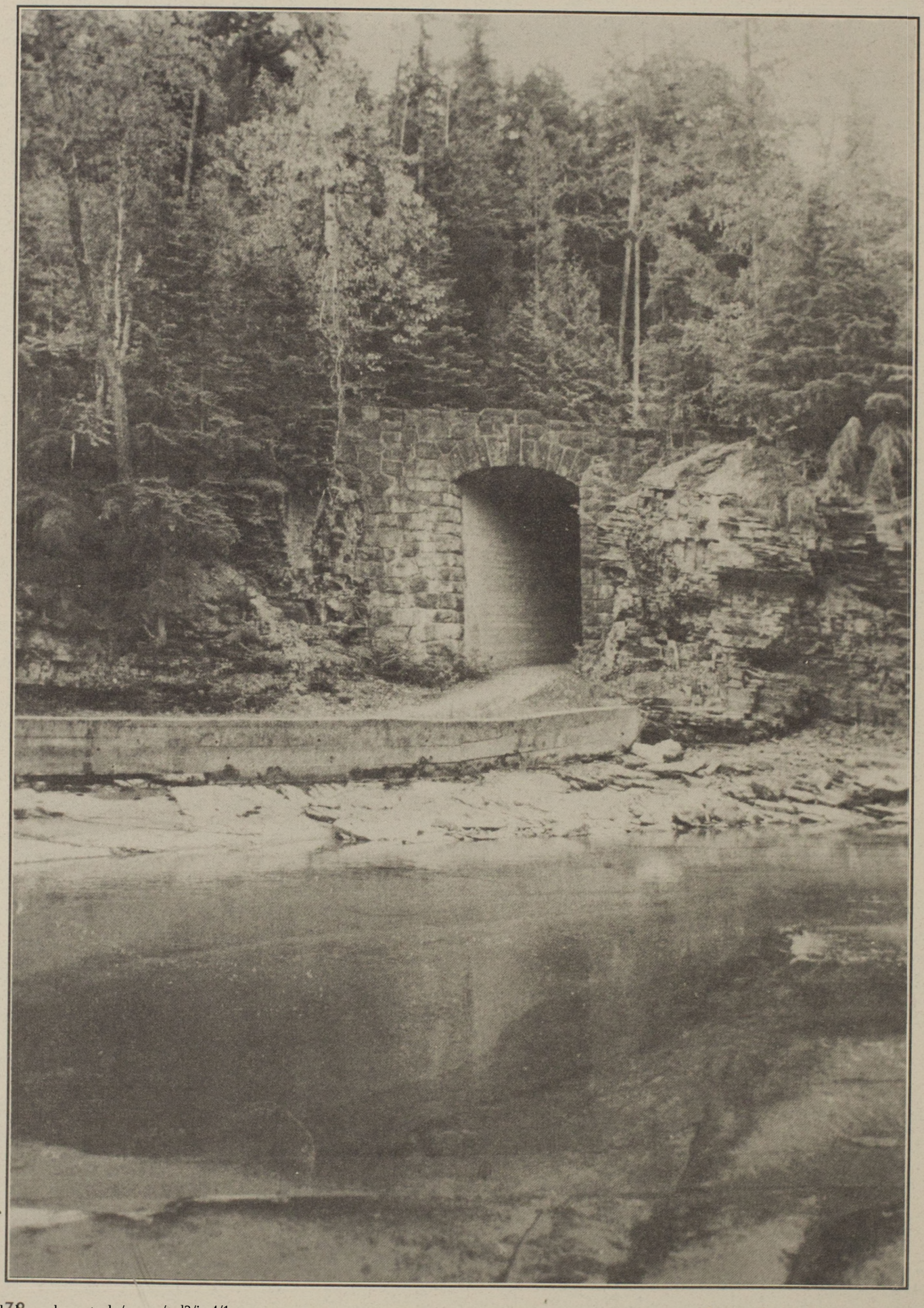


Photo by Natalie Sabin

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